

# Pure *as the* God Who Made It

Jordan Jeffreys

When I was young, I hated summer, and summer hated me. It was home to three horrendous weeks: Church Camp. The theme was the same every year. At nine-years-old, we were lambs to the slaughter, criminals that needed rehabilitation.

The Church loomed over the landscape, a stark concrete rectangle with no windows, except in the Big Room. As I walked through the lobby, I noticed cardboard cut-out jail cells. Parents took flash pictures of their kids behind bars, holding a placard—yes, just like the ones murderers hold up in mugshots, except these had one of the Seven Deadly Sins written across the middle in bold print.

The kids smiled, but their smiles were cheesy and practiced—fake. Mothers and fathers laughed and prattled in pairs, ignorant or apathetic to the dread behind their child's eyes.

Then, the parents left. Mothers' heels clicked on the tile floor. The grown-up walking sounds made my hands sweat and breath stop. We kids watched as our only saviors got into their cars and drove away. I chastised myself for thinking so; *Jesus didn't drive a Subaru.*

Our supervisors rushed us into the Big Room. I sat in a cold steel chair, one that sprung up, folding into itself if you had the audacity to stand back up. I looked around at the windows, now alive. They grew menacingly, elongating themselves into misshapen glass pillars. I couldn't shake the feeling it was not the windows getting taller, but me getting shorter. The thick atmosphere pressed in on me, shortening my spine until I prayed my cells would implode.

In science class, I'd learned this process was called cytolysis. I *wanted* my cell membranes to collapse. I *wanted* to explode right then and there.

A scruffy red-faced man stood on stage wearing a navy suit and brown driving gloves. He tapped on the microphone, and a piercing sound echoed through the room.

All the kids simultaneously turned their heads to the man. He looked small in comparison to the stage, the big television screens dark in the background. Littered across the walls hung pictures of Saints: Billy Graham, Aimee Semple McPherson, Paula White, Jim Baker, Jerry Falwell, and, of course, Ronald Reagan.

He cleared his throat. "Today, my friends, we will learn about Hell." His deep Southern accent bellowed through the room. It was the kind of voice that seemed like it was talking down to you like it knew something you could never comprehend.

He took a small remote out of his pants pocket and pressed a button. Suddenly, long blinds slowly slid down the windows, and the lights flickered off. We were surrounded by complete and utter darkness.

He pressed another button, and two screens lit up. The

white light stung the back of my eyes. He pushed the third button, and a teenage girl appeared on screen. She was chained to a wooden chair, crying and begging for forgiveness.

"Repentance," the man boasted. "Pure as the God who made it."

The girl's voice escaped faintly and she began to cough. Suddenly, her mouth made an "O" as black bugs and red snakes crawled out of her mouth. She tried to scream, but her terror was muffled. She shook and writhed against her chains.

The audience gasped, and air left my lungs. There was no point in crying. The man told us crying never helped. Only a \$30 fee, a dip under the water, and constant fear of the Lord could save you from *that* fate.

After a while, the girl stopped moving; her bugged-out eyes rolled back into her head.

"This is Hell," the man declared.

Then, the man led us to the Little Room. We lined up behind him, holding on to a coarse rope.

He turned toward us. "You are Prisoners of the Lord. You

I chastised myself  
for thinking so; *Jesus didn't*  
*drive a Subaru.*





*"Icarus," colored pencil by Kylee Maidhof*

are guilty until proved a Saint."

He guided us into the room, and once we were all inside, shut the door. He told us he would teach us to fear God. He turned around and walked out of the room, locking the door behind him.

The other kids were starting to panic: tears began to well in their eyes. My stomach churned, and I spilled exactly three tears onto the tile floor.

Suddenly, the lights turned off. The boy behind me yelled, *Turn around!* A wall of thin and waxy red, orange, and yellow paper was engulfing a cardboard house. Spotlights shone behind the tissue paper; it glowed. It glowed like Hellfire.

I heard a soft click, and smoke machines turned on, leaving us in a hazy fog. *Let us out!* We coughed and screamed. Kids cried for their parents. Others prayed to God. I prayed

to anyone who may be listening.

I bent down and sat on the floor: Stop. Drop. Roll. What seemed like an eternity passed, and the red-faced man slammed open the door. This time he wore a firefighter uniform and held a black water hose. Through the haze, I could still make out his intrepid stare. He was proud of his work.

"The Power of the Lord has arrived," he announced.

I lurched at the feeling of cold water hitting me with the force of a high-speed rail. The bruises it left afterward suggested the water was more solid than liquid.

We all began to laugh. Not because we thought it was funny, but because there was no other possible reaction.

He looked at me. His eyes were cold and blue.

I am not sure if the other kids heard, but I did. Under his breath, he muttered, "Fire, pure as the God who made it." 