

“LETTERS NEVER SENT: ALFRED HITCHCOCK TO TENNESSEE ERNIE FORD”

Dear Mr. Ford,

Thank you for your generous letter. It arrived as a most welcome surprise, not because it spoke of fear, but because it spoke of it with such kindness.

For much of my life, people assumed that because I made films about fear, I must have enjoyed it. The truth is considerably less glamorous. Fear was never a hobby of mine. It was more like an old companion who insisted on following me everywhere.

You are quite right that artists seldom invent their deepest subjects. More often, they spend a lifetime attempting to understand them. I did not place fear on the screen because I mastered it. I placed it there because I recognized it.

As a child, I was shy, nervous, and frequently anxious. Those tendencies never entirely left me. Success has a curious way of changing one's circumstances while leaving one's essential nature untouched. A frightened child may become a famous director, but somewhere inside he remains a frightened child who has simply acquired a larger audience.

What fascinated me was not fear itself, but the way ordinary people confront it. A hero in a melodrama expects danger. The rest of us do not. We are buying groceries, taking a train, answering a telephone, or enjoying a pleasant afternoon when uncertainty suddenly enters the room. In that moment, character reveals itself.

Your observation about courage struck me deeply. I believe you are correct that courage is not the absence of fear but the decision to proceed despite it. Every worthwhile endeavor requires that bargain. One makes the film anyway. One sings the song anyway. One loves another person anyway, despite knowing that loss is inevitable.

That last fear may be the greatest of all. Yet it is also what gives life its meaning.

I suspect that music and cinema share a common purpose. Neither can remove suffering from the world. Neither can eliminate loneliness or anxiety. But both can accompany people through those experiences. A song can do that in three minutes. A film can do it in two hours. Sometimes that companionship is enough.

Thank you for reminding me that audiences are not merely seeking excitement. Often they are seeking reassurance that their own fears are shared by others.

I am grateful for your words and for the warmth behind them.

With sincere appreciation,

Alfred Hitchcock