

Addressed to the current Milo Arts population:

12/23/2006

It is with a heavy heart that I write you, having not slept for hours. It is 6:45 AM on 12/23/2006.

To be or not to be.

These past months have brought me to my knees where I have sought for answers.

The Milo that I have supported to my last dollar and to my last hours is not the Milo I signed up for years ago.

I have lived in denial of the realities by which I am surrounded.

Each of you who came to Milo and were shown the history by me – the space, the community, the spirit of Milo – were shown something that really only existed in my memory, in my wishful thinking.

Milo Arts was a child in 1988 that represented my hopes and dreams for a better world – a world where individuals, battered and torn, bringing their baggage, would come for personal healing, for refuge, and ultimately to reflect their deliverance by growing, nurturing and loving others which would begin this process in another and another and ultimately we would share in the joy of being part of a personal, societal, cultural renewal that reached to the core of yours and my depression and dazzled us with hope, joy, etc. All this I knew would have to come from within our hearts as God worked within us to make it happen. At Milo, open hearts received and gave; then, each person's gifts, artistic and otherwise, flowed.

Oh how I want this to my last breath, until the final hour – for you, for me, for my children and children walking the streets with their heads down – without hope, without love, without purpose and also for children yet unborn. And I saw it. Darrell Duncan and Donna Mann nurturing children in the 'hood; Pat Durkin landscaping a church; droves of us cleaning up an entire district on a Saturday. Relationships, trust, and faith growing ..windows of light in the lives of those who gave and yet...

Here I sit, a prisoner to a lost dream, fitfully broken from the losses.

To my mom and dad

To Frances

To my wife Donna

To Russell Snider

To Jim Morton

To my sons – they gave me up for a cause.

The cause I thought so worth it all.

You taught me that the dream was over...

Feces smeared on the women's restroom.

Throw-up and worse in the men's.

Walls marked up and paintings disfigured.

Windows broken out.

Doors open, with our last dollars flowing out.

Those who look at me with disdain in their eyes when I know there is misery in their souls.

And most revealing of all ...mercenaries who will believe in your cause - "for a price".

Milo has become a place for the unwashed, the sad and the lonely.

I am done, as you all know - Milo represents a nightmare, not a dream.

There are a few (precious few) who cry at this epitaph - they say, "What went wrong? Can we, will we, try again?" For months I have analyzed the initial clarion call, which brought our founders to one mind, one intent, much love, much growth and the birth of Milo. Part of me never gives up, but part of me is as good as dead and gone.

And yet, in tears, or soft eyes or encouraging words they come again - so after numerous nights like this one... perhaps there is a core of individuals who would dare to live the dream.

Way back when there was a core - those who put it all on the line for what was begun here - they lived the dream of Milo, if only for a season. They lit my fire; they found a leftover 60's kid willing to live what he believed. Analyzing that group - there was a majority of professing Christians (the church-going type) yearning to see what they believe work in real life. There were others that operated on the age-old principles - love thy neighbor as thyself; give and it shall be given unto you. And there were others who were searching for answers, looking for a cause. As hard as we worked, it was a time of refreshing and they reaped what they had sowed.

So here I am in my 60th year on the planet - having, since I was 9, walking the streets of Naples, Italy, searched for answers to uplift the human condition, to find real hope for myself and others.

Who is ready to live the dream? - if there is no core to live the dream, then all of the resources are for naught.

Hard-core dreamers are those ready to put it all on the line - who will become owners, following in some respects the model of Habitat for Humanity.

There will be a meeting of the hard core. If you believe that this applies to you - call me.

Rick Mann
8:30 AM
12/23/2006