

# THE BIRD MAN OF ALCATRAZ

1962

United Artists, Screenplay by Guy Trosper. Based on the book by  
Thomas Gaddis. Directed by John Frankenheimer.  
Produced by Stuart Miller and Guy Trosper.

Setting: Leavenworth Prison, Alcatraz Prison,  
1912–early 1960s

Robert Stroud was perhaps one of the most famous prison inmates in United States history. His crime when compared to others is rather unsensational; his incarceration, however, has attained the status of legend.

Stroud was sent to Leavenworth Prison in 1912 for killing a man in an argument. His hostile and antisocial behavior attracted the attention of Schumaker, the warden, who then went out of his way to make Stroud's imprisonment unpleasant. In an uncontrollable rage, Stroud killed a prison guard and was sentenced to die.

Stroud's devoted mother met with First Lady Edith Wilson and pleaded for the life of her son. Her efforts were rewarded when Stroud's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in solitary confinement.

One day, as he was walking in the exercise yard, Stroud came upon a tiny bird with a broken wing. He rescued the bird and nursed it back to health in his cell. And so began his life's fascination and work. Before long, Stroud had managed to fill his cell with birds and scientific equipment with which to study them. He wrote volumes on their care and even discovered cures for bird diseases. His writings — and cures became nationally known, and soon the entire prison block was alive with birds.

Stroud's happiness was short-lived, however, for he was to be sent to the formidable rock of Alcatraz to live out his sentence. All of his books, equipment, and birds were taken away before he arrived in the grim fortress in San Francisco Bay. In Alcatraz, Stroud grew old. No longer the rage-filled man of his youth, his love for birds had helped to rehabilitate his nature. Stroud was finally released in the early 1960s, a quiet old man ready to live his own life.

GOMEZ

*Robert Stroud's colorful death-row neighbor mourns the death of his bird, which Stroud has given him. The bird's death reminds him of a woman in his past.*

Hey, Bob, you know, the baby bird just slipped me. Well, in case you're interested, he just knocked off. Punk. He dropped like he got shot in the head. Reminded me like an old girlfriend of mine named Peggy . . . Beaman. What a facet! Like a painful of worms. But stacked — enough to make your tongue hang out. Good-hearted broad, you know? She used to put out to me and every other guy in the neighborhood. A bum, in other words. Well, she had a bird, too. A parrot. And he, too, was ugly also — and one time I came up to her room and the door was open and she was trying to teach the parrot to say something. You'll get a boot out of this, Bob. You know what she wanted him to say? "I love you, Peggy." Over and over, you know? She kept at him: "I love you, Peggy." Oh, then two uglies. Figured she was some kind of nut so I faded and I never seen her no more after that time. Good old Peg. So what happens? So I wind up in the can and I'm talking to the birds just like she did.