

MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR: A STARTLING REVELATION

By Reverend Austin Miles

BRENTWOOD, NORTHERN CALIFORNIA (ANS) -- The grisly remains of long-missing Madalyn Murray O'Hair, her son, Jon, and her granddaughter, Robin, were found and positively identified, their murders verified. And this minister wept at the news. I had met her at a time of ministry burnout.

I saw a side of Madalyn that few, if any, were privy to. And, according to her family, I am the only Christian ever to be invited to her home for dinner and asked to give a testimony as to why I believed in Christ.

Not too long before her death, Madalyn Murray O'Hair appeared close to making a quiet turn-around in her life. That possibility was tragically thwarted by the sins of the very TV minister who had come close to reaching her.

That preacher may never know, until the final judgment, what his ministry might have been had he not failed to consider his identity as a Christian leader. His words were being heard and evaluated by the world's most famous atheist. And his words were having an effect.

I first met Madalyn in 1988 in a television studio in Memphis where we both were scheduled guests for a program. The morning papers were filled with accounts of her appearance the night before at a local university and how she almost provoked a riot.

Recognizing her, I said, "You're Madalyn Murray O'Hair?" "That's right!" she shot back defensively.

"I'm Austin Miles and I've been wanting to meet you. I was once an evangelist and I burned out. I'm now the historic narrator of The Royal Lipizzan Stallion Show (the white horses made famous by the Walt Disney movie, The Miracle of The White Stallions). We're doing a show here in Memphis tonight."

She warmed up and we began to chat. I told her that our show would play Austin, Texas in another week, and I invited her to see the performance as my guest. I assured her that I would provide security for her, which I did.

Madalyn, Jon and Robin accepted my invitation and were seated in the front row VIP seats. And true to what she had told me, people glared icily at her as she entered, whispering loudly, "There SHE is!"

Following the performance, we left by way of the stage door and rode to her home in the luxury of her brown Mercedes limousine.

Her home was elegant with rich paneling, wall-to-wall built-in bookcases filled to capacity and tasteful furnishings. A comfortable fire crackled in the fireplace.

While dinner was being prepared, classical music floated from her stereo as we discussed the various issues of life. She displayed none of the vulgarity or coarseness she was known for. She sat as an aristocrat and exhibited such intellect that I felt I was sitting with a present day, Ayn Rand. She was witty, stimulating, and indeed, charming.

Naturally the subject wound its way to religion. "Christians hate atheists," she proclaimed. "They don't want us teaching in the universities; they don't want us in any government jobs because they are terrified that we will one day destroy Christianity, and we will!"

"Look," I retorted, "if the Christians themselves, considering some of their conduct, haven't destroyed Christianity, then it is unlikely that any atheist, including you, can." At that she threw back her head and gave out a throaty laugh.

Then her expression changed as she began to describe her life. "Christians drive by and throw eggs at our home daily," she said. "We get threatening phone calls every day of our lives from Christians quoting the Bible to prove my doom. My son was beaten up 27 times in school and had to be taken to the hospital.

Once we thought a burglar was in our house and called the police. The cop said to me, "Why don't you just pray about it?" I'm talking about sarcastic. They gave us no help. And one night some Christians came by here and screwed planks across our doors so that the next morning we could not get out of our house."

"What about your son, William?" I asked her. "I heard that he is now a minister."

"He's a traitor!" she thundered, "and a phony, and I never want to see him or speak to him again. Like those who are taken hostage and then side with their captors, he has done the same thing with the Christians who terrorized him and beat him up so often as he was growing up."

We put our conversation on hold to go and be seated in the dining room. After a delicious meal, we returned to the living room to continue our discussion.

Then Madalyn shifted gears in a way I never expected. "Did you actually believe all that stuff about God and Christ and the Bible when you were involved with the church?"

"Oh yes." I replied without hesitation.

"But...why?...how?...you seem to be such an intelligent person."

I began to give my testimony of how God had dramatically made Himself real to me, and how I had personally witnessed miracles that were performed in His name. To my astonishment, Madalyn did not interrupt me once, nor did she try to stop me. Rather she leaned forward and listened intently for the entire hour and a half it took to tell the story. One and one half hours of glorifying God!

After I completed my testimony, Madalyn sat quietly for a few moments. Then, slowly, she said: "I have been watching..." and she named the TV preacher she had started watching. "And I've been watching him every week." She suddenly thrust her finger in the air to add this disclaimer: "Now I don't agree with what he is saying or what he represents...but I am convinced that he believes what he preaches and that is why I watch him."

Could it be? Had that well-known TV preacher actually swayed her? Nothing else could explain how she would ask me the question she did and then listen to my entire Christian testimony with total respect.

The next day she took me to the American Atheist Center, which housed the greatest private collection of religious books I had ever seen. Madalyn was a scholar and possessed a PhD in Religion.

Religion certainly held a prominent place in her life, which is why she talked about it so much. It ran deeper than most people suspected. She also showed me the private bathroom that had been constructed right next to her office because of her progressing diabetes.

We kept in contact by mail. It was not too long after that, that the TV preacher who almost persuaded her to become a Christian fell from grace with a thud that was heard throughout the world, bringing embarrassment to the entire Christian movement.

His national confession and claim of repentance did nothing to repair the damage. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who had let down her toughness with me and who had become open for the first time to listen to what the Scriptures said, felt that she had been made a fool of.

She was livid. And she promptly ended her friendship with me. She thought that I was playing mind games with her like all the rest. All Christians were phony!

At the time, I was working with David Balsiger on the television specials, Ancient Secrets Of The Bible, as a writer, researcher, technical consultant and one of the "talking heads." She sent a message to Balsiger with her opinion of me with a log of "f" words included in the description. She added that I should be condemned for helping to give credibility to the Bible with my work on that "scumbag project." Madalyn was hurt. She felt deceived by everybody.

When she, her son and granddaughter mysteriously disappeared in September of 1995, the rumor-mill began. The tales ranged from her running off to New Zealand with the American Atheist bank account, amounting to around \$700,000; that she was seriously ill and kept it a secret since she did not want any Christians coming to pray over her; and then there was the murder theory...

I discounted the first two as soon as I had been notified. I knew that whatever Madalyn was considered to be, she was not a thief. From what she told me, she did not believe in ill-gotten money. Furthermore, how far can \$700,000 really go for three people?

The second was dubious to me. From my observation point, Christians were not willing to pray for her or with her. Indeed, they were devoted only to an unrelenting campaign of viciousness toward

her and her family that was so vile that it only could have been generated from the pits of hell. They had written her off long ago. So this was not a valid explanation.

(I do not include all Christians in this assessment. Two in particular who were aware of my relationship with Madalyn; Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, and filmmaker David Balsiger, who both had a burden for her soul and prayed for her. And I am sure there were others.)

The remains of Madalyn, Jon and Robin were found dumped at a remote ranch in Real County, 90 miles west of San Antonio. Their identities were confirmed. Nobody deserved to die like that. According to The New York Times (3/16/01) their bodies were burned and stacked haphazardly across each other after their legs had been cut off. And that is what many Christians had been praying for. A horrible death for her. Worse still, some are still gloating over the tragedy.

Which brings up this question: Doesn't the Bible clearly instruct us to "Take the Gospel to all creatures?" I do not recall it adding, "...except for atheists." Isn't every unbeliever basically an atheist? Why does giving unbelievers that title make them different and separated from any chance of redemption? Where was the Christian witness?

Yes, Madalyn was vulgar to the point of being repulsive, defiant and combative. What else should be expected after the consistent barrage of harassment she endured from a group that is supposed to show meekness and love, which makes the offenses extra ugly. It should be clear why Madalyn and others would want to see Christianity driven out of society.

Nobody had the courage or true personal conviction to witness to Madalyn. They only wanted to destroy her. That doesn't take faith or any trust in God.

Those who had a part of the hatred spewed at the O'Hair family will have her blood on their hands.

This tragedy is a sad indictment on the entire Christian community and its leaders. And this writer is under the same indictment. To my own shame, I failed to pray for her. I should have been doing that continually after meeting her. But I didn't. This is why I am still grieving as I write this.

Madalyn's personal diary was found after she was reported missing. In it she wrote: "I have failed in marriage, motherhood, as a politician." Then, she added these lines, repeated six times: "Somebody, somewhere, love me."

That was something many of us failed to do!

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