

In the film the Shawshank Redemption directed by Frank Darabont, Andy Du fresne is sentenced for life in Shawshank Prison for the murder of his wife and her lover. We follow Andy as he gets used to life inside the walls of Shawshank. One of Andy's friends is Brooks Hatlen. As the oldest man at the prison Brooks demonstrates vulnerability. We see through him the effects that institutionalism can have on someone who has been placed in a facility for more than half his life." (1) They send you here for life and that's exactly what they take, the part that counts anyway." (2)

Brooks has been in prison for most of his life and he does not seem dangerous. He comes across as a harmless but eccentric old man to Andy and viewers. We meet him in the cafeteria where he asks Andy for the maggot: "You gonna eat that?" "Hadn't planned on it" "You mind? Mmm... Nice and ripe." We then notice that the maggot is to feed his pet, a baby rook called Jake. Brookes almost seems at home in prison (3).

Brookes is seen as harmless person by the prison staff because he is so old and doesn't cause trouble. He is also educated so he is made librarian of the prison. He has privileges others don't have – like he gets to be out of his cell and talk to people. He is useful to the prisoners - like when he smuggles the Rock Hammer through into Andy's cell using a book as a decoy. He becomes one of Andy's good friends and starts to get quite excited about the positive changes coming to Shawshank because of Andy (4).

Brooks shows us his craziness when he holds a knife to Heywood's throat because he hopes that the Parole board will see him as this crazy old man and take back the parole and lock him up again (5).

"It's what they've done. I got no choice...It's the only, it's the only way they'd let me stay."(6)

"The man's been in here fifty years Heywood, fifty years. This is all he knows. In here, he's an important man, he's an educated man. Outside he's nothin' — just a used up con with arthritis in both hands (7).

Brooks doesn't have the desire to be free and he is ill-prepared for getting out of Shawshank. (8). Jake is a wild bird who is meant to be free. Just before Brooks departs the prison the next dawn, he releases the full-grown Jake at the library window. He tells the bird that he can no longer look after him, that he is free. Jake has been locked up in the prison with Brooks; but Jake knows how to cope with his freedom and Brooks finds it hard to cope with the freedom.

Brooks is frail and insecure when he is finally released into the outside world. He can see no future for himself (9). In his letter to his friends, he tells them of the outside and how everyone has gone and gotten themselves in a big damn hurry. Even though Brooks is given a second chance when he is let out on parole he can't adjust to his new role in the world so he hangs himself.