



What I believe

BY JAKE ZEITLIN

What I believe

is not a matter of high-flown language; it is an operational problem related to how I try to live with my family, my friends, and my society.

I believe that I must govern my life by reason and I have the wish, which precedes the faith, that reason shall govern other men. I join Jefferson in the belief that tyranny over the minds and lives of men is evil and I try to avoid imposing my will or philosophy on others.

I believe in discipline, but only the fruitful discipline that is self-imposed. Some poets and philosophers have argued that man and his planet are doomed. I do not accept this as a condition of how I should live. If I were sure the world would end in ten days from Friday, I would start to build a house or write a poem.

I believe that I must accept my share of responsibility for what happens to me, including my accidents and mistakes.

I believe in human dignity and that dignity is worth keeping for myself so much that I will not impose indignities on others.

Fear is my direst enemy and next to fear, pride, which is the other face of vanity, and the twin of folly. I remember the old man of my boyhood in Texas who said once,

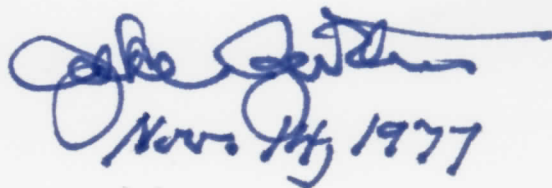
"Boys, they can kill us but they can't eat us." I do not believe in returning the insult of others in kind. They cannot demean me, but I can demean myself. Therefore, I will not be governed by those who would deprive me of my dignity by threats, insults or flattery.

I believe that a good laugh does more good than a long face. Laughter is something I have had to learn from my good Dutch wife, whose ancestors have lived happily under gray skies for many years. It is easier for me to forgive a gay rogue than a serious fool.

My occupation as a bookseller is an expression of my beliefs. My days and nights are spent with books and bookish people. Whatever brings knowledge to men, whatever raises their minds and emotions, whatever preserves the products of their imagination and their history, has value to me. The written and printed word survives persecution, book burning, censorship and fashions. When I sell a man a good book I am the happy transmitter of a precious thing and I feel I have justly earned my profit.

I believe in the scientific attitude above the unscientific, but I am not of the faith that science will save us. Science can free man from the physical hardships of nature but only a profound respect for the dignity of all humanity can free us from the misery of man.

Lastly, I believe that my wife, my children, and my fellow-workers are my truest judges. I cannot gain credit from them for what I am not. What I believe will have to stand the test of day-by-day living. They will know and, I hope, tell me truthfully.


Nov. 14, 1977