



Pegasus

Spring 1998

According to mythology, the magnificent winged steed Pegasus was created by Poseidon from beach sand and sea foam combined with the blood of Medussa's severed head.

The exquisite creature was caught and tamed by the ancient god Belerophon, who used the horse's extraordinary abilities to aid him in his exploits. When Belerophon attempted to fly to heaven, he fell off the steed. Pegasus continued the ascent, eventually evaporating into stars making the heavens his permanent dwelling place.

The constellation Pegasus, in the classical tradition, shows his foreparts flying upside down. The most easily recognizable feature of the constellation is the great square representing the front trunk of his body. Pegasus has transformed from the myth of a creature who ascended to the heavens into the constellation memorializing his exquisite beauty and amazing courage.

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Editorial and Production Staff

Herb Anderson

Lorraine Antrim

Diana Bennett

Lynn Bennett

Dessa Crawford

Colleen Dunn

Jessica Fritzinger

Patrick McDaid

Patricia Marie Moran

Victoria Murdock

Mary O'Malley

Sue Yocum

Editor

Heidi Simon

Literary Advisor

James Roman

Graphic Designer

A. Aveda Kitabjian

Graphic Design Advisor

Judith Wisniewski

Special Thanks to

Daniel Childers, Astronomy Consultant

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Address all correspondence to Pegasus Magazine, Campus Life Office,
Delaware County Community College, Media PA 19063

For information on submitting writing or art work to Pegasus, contact
the Campus Life Office at 610-359-5341

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Joy

They say, "misery loves company," and that's a shame!
Because who would want to live with so much pain?
Why not laugh, and smile, and sing, and live your life?
Who would want to bother with the strife?

Wouldn't you rather feel light as a feather,
Than weighed down and chained in fetters?
Or, who in their right mind would live in a cell,
If upon the highest mountain one could dwell?

If you ask me personally,
For love, and life, and peace I yearn.
Because joy loves company too,
And gives much in return.

Brett M. Frieze

Failure

Failure is my friend! It teaches me who and what I am.
That I am just a creature and not Almighty God,
It humbles me and shows me how much I need His grace.

Yes, I'll say it again, failure is my friend!
It takes me from my selfish ways,
And has me reaching out for more.
Something true, something perfect,
Something stable, something sure.

So I ask my friend to stay with me,
And remain with me throughout my days.
That God might look upon my brokenness
And show me a better way.

Brett M. Frieze

The World Says

The World says I have no ambition,
Yet I hope, I dream.

The World says I'm not intelligent,
Yet I believe I am.

The World says I won't succeed,
Yet I know I will.

The World says my thoughts aren't important,
Yet I know they are.

The World says my voice won't be heard,
Yet I know it will.

The World says I can't live without money,
Yet I know I could.

The World says I need many friends,
Yet I only need some.

The World says my Savior is dead,
Yet I know he lives.

The World says many things,
Yet I don't listen.

Mark Fields

Looking On

Angled against the sky,
the people's nest
stares at passers-by
through frowning windows
harboring sleeping children,
and wiry cats.

Blue light emanates from
a living room TV.

It flashes bright, then flickers:
making the house seem alive

with dreams,

dreams from a box in a box,

dreams in a flickering, frowning giant.

Cathy Celley

My Soul Has Not Died

I'm sorry I've gone and left you behind,
But think of the memories I left in your mind.

My heart is not gone for it's within you,
Just look in yourself you know I love you.

I didn't forget to warn you that I was going,
For I was unsure and unknowing.

While lying asleep God called out my name,
I took his hand without a doubt
Knowing you wouldn't blame.

I've gone to his kingdom to rest in my bed,
But my soul is within you,
In your heart and your head.

I love you all it's very true,
And every day that passes, I will be watching and thinking of you.

I'm closer to you now than I've ever been,
Because I am inside of you and all of my kin.

To my family AND ALL with whom I've shared my life,
I am now within you
MY
forever lasting light.

Shannon E. Finn

The Papa Never Seen

The Papa never seen but all too often heard,
By the neighbors and us children when he spoke those wicked words.
Papa, Papa you have no face,
You beat and bruised my mama - you caused disgrace.

You raised your fist oh so high,
Then you dropped it on my mama just to make her cry.
Slap, Slap, Slap, you hit some more,
Somebody help my mama before she hits the floor.

Stompin' on the ground, spittin' and a slappin'
All our little faces who were desperately askin'
Young and scared how we did fear,
That you would break all that was precious and dear.

After a furious fight mama did flee,
It was what she had to do to save us three.
Courageous and caring she entered the night,
With all of us behind her this deed would shed some light.

Goin' wasn't easy but stayin' really hard.
Your days might be numbered - who knows what's in the cards.
Careful with each move - don't want you to know,
Now through mama's eyes - her love is free to show.

One foot too close to my mama dear,
It'll be your lousy life, that you're gonna fear.
"An eye for an eye," that's what I say.
That's the cheapest price that you will pay.

Papa, Papa, you have no face.
In this family - you have no place.

Victoria Murdock

Song of the Unborn

Where were you when Caesar reigned,
Or when Neptune ruled the sea?

Where were you when Custer fought,
The war at Wounded Knee?

You were blank, oblivious,
As were the rest of we,

Or were we standing in a line,
For our turn to be?

The autumn chill as cold as death,
It freezes summer's bloom,

But how can another summer live,
If the old won't meet its doom?

You shall live and do your time,
But be aware and see,

That many more are waiting still,
For their turn to be.

Kathryn Ganime

Mother's Trunk

I went to the Jade Room,
What did I see?
A chest full of objects,
Worthless to me.

Tiny clothes faded and torn,
Records kept since we were born.

Musty air with broken toys,
Of playful girls and playful boys.

Withered flowers, paper hearts,
Mother sighs, she has played her part.

Kathryn Ganime

Let The Man Take Me

I am old now.
My hair is white.
Let the man take me;
Take me into the light.
Old and withered like the apple tree,
That no longer stands behind the house that doesn't belong to me.
My children are a memory,
My grandchildren brought such joy to me.
The need to go now is very strong you see,
Because the man has a need to take me.
I am old now.
My hair is white.
My life has been long and fruitful, until tonight.
For the man has come to take me;
Take me into the light.
Just one more word I'll say tonight.
The urge is strong to say goodnight.

Kathy Shoemaker

The Thorns of a Rose

The sweetness of a rose,
It seems to have no foes.
Don't forget a rose has thorns,
Like an angel who bears horns.

Love shall always be encompassed in pain,
For misery has always run through its veins.
The sweetest thing on this earth,
Has not been like that since birth.

There is an evil side that we don't see,
Or at least we believe it will never be.
Love's greatness most likes to pirouette,
But don't forget its true silhouette.

A rose can be oh so great,
But everything has an evil mate.

Mark Fields

Fire Tongue

Oh cursed tongue, sharper than spears,
Pierces through hearts,
Lances through ears!

Kathryn Ganime

Phases of Wisdom

In the sunrise of my life I knew nothing,
As I approached early morning I knew something,
Upon midday I knew a little more,
Late afternoon I still had more to learn,
By twilight I knew almost everything,
But then, it was too late.

Kathryn Ganime

The Mask

You think you see me,
But you don't,
I'm a wanderer,
A child of many faces,
The bitch,
The sweetheart,
The angel,
The demon,
Nobody knows me,
Nobody sees me,
Nobody understands.

Kathryn Ganime

Oh Joyous Boredom

Falling through infinity, just to pass the
time.

Spiraling in earnest, my thoughts become
sublime.

Thinking in a tense where time just
cannot be,

I journey on in flight, to linger on
eternally.

Michael Machette

Trust

Trust
is a dangerous thing.
There's a desire
a need
to trust,
but who is willing to open up?
Once you let them in,
they know —
And they can help you,
but they won't.
They take advantage
like a thief who comes in the night
to kill and destroy.
They kill and destroy.
And when it's over
you look back and realize your error.
Your foolish, naive heart
builds another wall
Thicker
and harder to get through.
But is it thick enough?
Will it ever be thick enough?

Margaret Glenn

Everybody, Nobody

The view through a crazy man's eyes seems quite normal.

Fear and degradation roam the darkened city streets,
While hatred lingers in the background.

All quite normal you see.

The death that is truly our fate,
Is aided along by our own abusiveness.

All quite normal you see.

And me, who am I? No one.

Just another crazy man,
In a world gone insane.

Another nobody questioning the gift of life,
Terrified by the reality of death.

All quite normal you see.

Edward S. Bowe

A Small Gift of Love

Today I'm to show my love towards you,
But my ideas on how are so few.
How do I show something greater than space;
How do I clutch something that has no place?
How do I envision something unseen;
How do I conceive something that has no being?
My love for you seems to find no end,
Throughout time and space it bends.
I wish a description of it I could find,
But it's too complex for mortals' minds.
Realities, confines, my love has broken,
So I can't show it with a gift, a token.
I don't know what else to say,
But you get me through every day.
You're the reason at daybreak I open my eyes;
You're the reason I have no more cries.
You make my spirit so strong;
You give me a sense that I belong.
You encourage me when I fall down;
You keep my heart off the frigid ground.
You're the one that ends my pain;
You're the one that keeps me sane.
You're the one that stole my heart;
You keep me smiling from the day's start.
Your love is the greatest gift I've received,
The same I hope you believe.
My thoughts have become so few,
So all I can say is I Love You.

Mark Fields

Poetry

I see poetry in your eyes,
Poetry within those lips,
They drip words as sweet as wine,
Forcing my heart to commit.
I see poetry in your eyes,
Lines that ring and rhyme with beauty.
I see poetry in your eyes,
Without words, it draws you to me.
I hear symphonies when you smile,
Your touch bears song so soothing.
Birds sing when you laugh,
It's like heaven's rejoicing.
I see the sun rising as your day grows in bliss.
When you hold me I see mountains, under the glow of golden mist.
Then I see rain, soft and silvery,
And valleys of daisies and dew drops when you're kissing me.
The world glitters so perfectly,
I can't express all that I see,
When I look in your eyes,
It's poetry.

Keyana Barbour

Her Dark Tower

She lies in her tower,
Cold and light faced.
Holding on to the dead flower,
Wishing for some grace.

The stem's sharp thorns,
Pierce her light skin.
Her body that was scorn,
Seems so very slim.

Her bitter sore hand,
Reaches for the light.
It's warmth she demands,
Since she's lost her sight.

Her salt worn eyes,
Try to shed a tear.
She lets out a cry,
For in the window stands fear.

Her bludgeoned heart,
Races in the pain.
Love's poisonous dart,
Once again maims.

Mark Fields

I Wish

I wish I was the moon,
Reflecting on a car's hood.
I wish I was a deer,
Hiding in the dark woods.

I wish I was a hawk,
Gliding through the sky.
I wish I was a rock,
Praying to someday die.

I wish I was a rose,
Standing so tall and vain.
I wish I was a star,
Shining over man's domain.

I wish I was a tree,
Living without salty tears.
I wish I was a man,
Running because of fear.

I wish I was so much I see,
I just wish not to be me.

Mark Fields



Shell Elaine Packer



Tree Stump Elaine Packer

Trade

Glastnost has quelled us.
Bomb shelter fears become
a silliness, a novelty

New fears arise

as 6 & 7 figure salaries
steal the souls
of the powerful

and strings are pulled to make us dance
a healthcare-packaged sideshow
while paying for the song
and praying it continues...somehow.

No shelter helps now.

The poisons rise and sift, stir
the mix of air we breathe-

Poisons of convenience, luxury:
nail polish removers;
perm-burn solutions;
cyanide compounds for foams
and glues

-Fumes so ingrained into our culture
that to boycott the products that cause them
seems a paltry gain of air
considering the benefits of
polished nails,
wavy hair,
a cushion,

or a sticky liquid fastener.

Spoiled multitudes.

Terrorism need not show its ugly head of destruction:

We destroy ourselves.

Doctors note

their patients talk

of aching bones

and pain they thought

reserved

for those

more

their seniors.

Children cough and wheeze.

gasp for air late at night

for no apparent reason.

Asthma's on the rise.

"The luck of the genetic draw."

we figure

as we wade in an ooze of air.

Herbicides.

pesticides

steal our lives

like an unleashed genocide

on all races.

Glastnost has freed us to see-

focus

on

the imperceptible
gases
robbing us of
life.

Who started this?

How woven is the world
when killers are so numerous
that our jobs and homes
harbor the deadly?
Who planted these?

Society
in its yearning for success and glamour
like a captured monkey, trained
by generations of corporate greed,
has chased its golden banana
off a cliff.

We tumble into chemical intoxication
and third world poverty.

Who can we blame?

Not our parents alone
Not our enemies alone
Not our ancestors or ourselves...alone.

Perhaps
their dreams. Our dreams
have led us to
this cesspool of products
that corrode our health,
our humanity,
our —once believed sacred— goals.
The American Dream
(that has become the world's)
has caused a pollution
of land, sea and soul.

Is there a star,
a wise man,
a savior now?

Or must we each try to be
these three beings
to preserve
— NOT OUR LIFESTYLES —
to preserve...
our lessons learned
so that life,
in human form,
can THRIVE without
the annihilation of
this vaporous ball
of molten landscapes
and oceans stirred by the moon.

Cathy Celley

Waiting

There is a man in my life. He sings, he smiles, he laughs, and he aches. He holds me with his eyes and wraps his arms around me. He has kissed me with such bittersweet passion that tears well up inside me.

Never has there been such a man. He is soft and gentle. He brings back feelings I thought I had lost forever and ones I never knew I had. His laughter lifts me to the skies and his tears can send me crashing to the ground. Everything about him makes me want to fall in love with him, if only I could remember how. But I see the anguish in his eyes, I feel his heart weeping and I want to reach into his soul and remove the thorn that pricks him endlessly. I want to hold him and let him cry until all of the pain drains away.

His sadness is as contagious as his laughter. I am constantly aching because I am fully aware that there is nothing I can do to ease his suffering. All I can do is watch him come apart at the seams, thread by thread.

But when the threads are all unraveled and pieces of him lie on the floor, he will pick himself up and start his life anew. So until then, I will watch him cry, and ache, and bleed from his wounded soul. Until then I will wait.

Michelle E. Boyles

Things Remembered

She looked around at the large room she sat in. From her place at the desk she could see the piano, the chairs, the chalkboard. When it was filled, it was a room of laughter and song. Now it was empty and too cool for her comfort.

She lifted herself out of her seat and moved towards the window. She lifted it high and removed the glass guard. Perched on the window sill, she leaned her face into a biting November wind. She let the cold air wash over her, remembering a cool November evening years before.

They had hurried up the steps from the car crowded with people. The rain beat down hard as they stood at her door. She could feel the dampness move through her hair, clothes, and could feel the icy droplets on her face.

He talked for a moment and then slipped his arms around her waist. He looked at her, wiped the rain from her cheek and kissed her.

It was not the first time she had been kissed, not even the first time he had kissed her. But it was the first time she realized she truly did love him, the first time in a long time that she had actually been happy.

He was long gone by now. Other men had passed through her life and even if she didn't love him anymore, she remembered that kiss. Today, in the November wind, she could feel his hand on her skin, his arms around her body, and his lips locked in hers.

Although he had hurt her, although he was gone, that kiss was always with her and on a cold day like today, she resurrected that kiss and it comforted her.

Michelle E. Boyles

E du du

"Flight 130 to Philadelphia is now boarding at gate 5-C," the loudspeaker chanted. I looked deep into his eyes and he into mine. After 30 years, I finally knew the old man before me. Our arms went around each other in one synchronized movement and I felt our souls hold each other. This trip had been too short. We had wasted too much time playing tourist. He had taken me to all the places where he was known, which was everywhere. At times, we'd sat quietly in each other's company, reading and listening to music. For all the years we'd spent together, I knew him as a quiet man, although he was a jokester too. His style of humor was sarcasm, keeping people, including his family, from really knowing him. The four days had almost passed before we grew comfortable enough to open up to each other. But the last night as we sat eating fried bread and ham at the Painttown diner, years of history flowed freely between us. My grandfather shared his story with me. I told him how much he really meant to me.

"We are now seating rows 8 through 15, have your boarding passes ready please." The intimacy of last night still enveloped us both. Now that I really knew what was here, how could I leave again? As we released the hold, I looked into his deep eyes and saw my own reflection. A connection to my family that had never existed before now pulsed within me. Slowly, I turned and bent down for my carryon bag. I slipped the strap over my shoulder, hiked the bag up, and moved forward. Salt flavored my mouth and my eyes burned. I would not look back.

On the plane the tears flowed freely. I watched out my window as we rose above the Appalachians. Back to Philly — back. I closed my eyes against my destination and memories came rushing in.

My granddaddy towered over me when I was six or seven. Like a tall mountain pine, he stood, just as quiet. He did not live on the reservation then, he lived in a brick Virginia rancher with his second wife. Like many Virginia homes, his was surrounded by huge magenta and white azaleas blooming softly across the face of the house. At this home there was a stream running at the end of his backyard. When we visited, I always ran to play in it. He would holler "Watch out for i`nadu".

I loved to visit his home. He had unique things hanging on the walls, like a wolf mask, and a blow gun. Drums, rattles and baskets were everywhere and his shelves were full of books. We shared an insatiable appetite for reading. The visits were special because since we'd moved from Virginia to Pennsylvania, we did not see him often. They were always in the summertime, and we'd have a cookout. His second wife had three daughters, and they had one together. My aunt Beth, two years younger than me, was a perfect playmate. Because all my

other relatives lived in Virginia then, we would make the trip once a year, and spend a day or two with him. Granddad's was always my favorite!

When I was ten, as we drove South across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, I dreamt about the turtle I was sure to catch in Granddaddy's stream. I wondered if I would see a snake this year. When we arrived I was surprised to find many boxes piled up in the garage filled with his things. Granddaddy was preparing to move.

"But why are you moving, Granddaddy? This is your home and your really cool stream, don't you like it here?" I must have fired off 20 more questions in the same breath, because a smile broke across his face, and sent me off to play. After our visit, in the car heading home I drilled my mom "Where is granddaddy moving to?"

"A mountain in Cherokee, that's in North Carolina" she said. "It's in the Great Smoky Mountains."

"But why there?" I asked as I tried to picture smoking mountains.

"Because that is where his people are from. His mother Dora Lee Crowe still lives there. It's an Indian reservation." She added.

Now my imagination really took off. "Don't you have to be an Indian to live on a reservation?"

"He is."

"HE IS? NO WAY!"

"Your granddad is Cherokee, so am I and you are a little too. Both his mother and he were sent to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, and like most Indians today, they look and act like white people." I was pretty quiet for the rest of the trip, trying to see my granddad in an Indian village holding a spear dressed in his suit and tie. I decided he didn't belong on any smoking mountain, I liked him in his azalea covered rancher.

I grew dispirited as it occurred to me that this had been my last visit to the house I knew as his, even more so when I learned that his family was not going with him. He was in fact divorcing again, and Beth would be staying with her mother in Virginia. How much he was leaving behind, I thought. Why? What would make him leave his wife and children, his work and his home? It was a haunting mystery that remained unanswered, and as we drove into our driveway and back into our daily routine, I was awakened to the realization that I hardly knew this man.

We didn't hear from him that fall. I didn't think too much about him as school occupied my time. But that Christmas, under our tree with a note came my first pair of moccasins. Now he lived on top of a mountain.

The following summer my granddaddy came to pick me up to take me to his new home.

It took eighteen hours of driving through the Shenandoah Valley, down to the Great Smokies. The rolling hills of the Shenandoah stretched out in all directions but one. Before us the hills grew larger. As we traveled forward the road rose and the green hills gave way to stone. I tired of reading books and doing word puzzles, so I put them aside, watched the scenery change and glanced at my granddad. As we traveled through the smoky mist a new mountain was revealed at each turn. Suddenly, there in the rocks were his high craggy cheekbones and the deep furrows and ridges seen in his round face. They stood tall and quiet, like he did most of the time. As if for the first time I saw the true color of his eyes. They were the chestnut brown of the tree trunks in the forests we wound our way through, set deep like the trees, dancing and sparkling, especially as he joked around with me, which was nonstop on this trip. Small, straight mountain flowers growing sideways on steep slopes were like his tiny mouth. They held a hint of mirth. Granddad's hair was stone-gray, with hints of black still streaking through. His hair wisped around the sides and the top peaked like the Mountains at Soco Gap.

At Soco Gap we stopped the car near a ledge that protruded out the side of the mountain. From here the mist of the Smokies could be seen encircling balding mountain tops in every direction. We stayed there, breathing in the mist until finally granddaddy turned and walked back to his car. I watched him glide straight, tall and narrow, like the pines that were all around. So straight was his waist, it appeared that his pants should just slide to the ground. The mountain balsam swayed with the same rhythm his long drooping arms followed.

Back in the car, as we headed down Route 19 again, granddaddy broke his silence. He began to tell me about his country. "Last year I lived on top of the mountain in a different home, but I kept getting snowed in. I was the only one up there. When the spring thaw came, I decided I didn't want to go through that again,..." he continued to chat. As he did my mind drifted back to the question I had thought about last year. It was on the tip of my tongue. I wanted to know why, but divorce was a grown-up subject, and he was now a distant man of mystery. I swallowed hard, and pushed the question down into my belly. "I think you'll really like it" he finished, then nothing more, and the silence returned. I digested his words to the drone of his old Buick struggling up the mountain.

Along the road a clearing appeared where summer season tenters camped, forming neat rows along the river. "God Damn Tourists" granddaddy muttered, half to himself. Beyond the campground a small ways, a little church stood, and just past this, we turned into a driveway. A small home, surrounded by wild mountain flowers came into view. The car stopped and I jumped out. Two things embraced me simultaneously, the crisp air and the rushing sound of the river. Just behind the house, the Soco river runs on to meet the Oconaluftee further down in the village of Cherokee. Here the Soco is about 15 feet wide and runs swiftly over mountain

boulders, some broken down over time. My heart lifted at the sight and sound of the clear clean water. I ripped off my travel worn shoes and jumped into the river. Instantly pain seared up my legs and shouted into my brain — COLD!!! I glanced up and saw my granddad standing above me on the bank, looking warriorlike and very pleased. “Watch carefully for i`nadu” he said in Tsalagi. His eyes were sparkling brighter than the crystal waters in which I swam.

I spent the summer hiking up the mountain and along the stream. When we went into town, Granddad knew everyone. “Si’ Yu Sherman” they would call and wave. That year he was the executive director of the Qualla Indian Boundary Projects, and his office was at the new community center. I spent my days doing crafts and playing with the children of the tribe. On weekends, I would swim in the deep hole formed in the Soco by rocks placed to block its flow; or wander down the path to the house of Mrs. Bigmeat.

Mrs. Bigmeat was old. She sat hunched outside her shack splitting cane and soaking reeds in oversized pots with bloodroots or walnuts. Beside the pots were piles of red and black cane. I watched her weave rhythmically, and before my eyes a tri-colored basket with criss-cross patterns would grow from the piles of rush. I tried to work some reeds into the form of a basket, but never could. Mrs. Bigmeat, who never spoke, plopped a ball of river clay in my hands instead, and guided my hand to form a small pot. She then showed me how to stamp a pattern on it from a carved wood block. She held it over a smoky fire of dried corn cobs. I watched the smoke rising up to the sky.

Days were warm but the mountain nights came quick and were cool. One night, a storm blew through. Outside the wind howled. “Miriyah,” granddad said. “The wind is called miriyah, but in the old language it is u`no’le.” That night he told me stories of Selu, (say-loo) Grandmother Corn. It started “In the beginning, the Creator made our Mother Earth. Then came Selu, Grandmother Corn, Mother of us all.” He told me a story of Selu and Kanati that expressed the Cherokee philosophy of harmony. Harmony in women and men, of humans and nature. Selu came into the world singing. She came from the top of a cornstalk, strong, ripe and tender. She is the genesis story of the principal people. I sat at his feet and listened. He planted the seed for my spiritual belief in the Creator, and my acceptance of a feminine face in God.

“Unto These Hills” the sign read. We passed it every day on the way to the center. “What is it granddad?” “That is the drama of the ‘Trail of Tears’, we are going tomorrow night.” I had plenty more questions, but as usual, this was all he had to say about that. The next night, we dressed warm and headed out at dusk. As we wound our way up the mountain in town, we passed the Cherokee history museum and the authentic Indian village. Then beyond the village I saw a gate. Before the gate burned the eternal flame under a glass. Granddad told me

it was brought back to the mountain from Oklahoma, after the Qualla Boundary was established. It has always burned for the Cherokee. Through the gate was the theatre cut into the stone of the mountain. The stage below was only a dirt area, with two raised rock sides. The lights dimmed low, and an ancient ceremonial dance opened the play. It is the story of the Cherokee from just before the arrival of DeSoto, up to the removal of the tribe to Oklahoma. The beautiful eagle dance swelled my heart with pride, while the heartbreaking wrenching of a people from their homes left me longing and sad. In bed that night I cried for his people and mine.

The summer came to an end. I was put on a plane in Asheville and returned home. That was the only summer spent in Cherokee. Years passed, and we visited for long weekends, but not very often. I did not have a lot of contact with Granddad. When he called on the phone, he talked to me for just a moment, then to my mother. Soon I didn't know what to say to him, he certainly wasn't a master conversationalist.

There was one way I connected with him once a year though. Every year they would be there, sitting under the Christmas tree, wrapped in a lumpy package. I would search for them while my family opened up their expensive gifts. I searched. I knew they were there. Not a year had passed without them. My new moccasins, handmade in Cherokee. These were not like any other moccasins sold. They were hand stitched by people named Bushyhead or Deerkiller, or Bigmeat. People he knew. A new piece of turquoise and a pair of moccasins - I knew it was Christmas for sure only after I had slipped them on and tied the simple leather straps. When I put on my moccasins I knew who I was.

It didn't matter so much that I felt very lost and alone in a family that was falling apart. My stepfather, who had never accepted me had progressed into alcoholism, my mother was in survival mode. I was barely surviving, but that didn't matter so much now. Christmas was often marred by a drinking binge and a shouting match, or sometimes worse. Feeling small and helpless, I would slip on my moccasins and go awalkin'. I walked into the woods behind my home, and my spirit soared. I was connecting to something — The Indian Way. I walked in beauty. I walked a beauty path, cultivating mind and soul, feeling a connection to the universe. These ideals must have been stitched into the leather, because they touched me every time I put on my new moccasins

A sense of love came to me from ancestors I did not know. Years of divorce and dividing kept me from knowing my family closer. Now, my stepfather worked at chiseling away the connection. He mocked my grandfather's simple gifts. "Another pair of slippers? Christ if he's going to send that Indian crap, at least he could send something different every year." He pushed my mother away from her father, and I lost the chance to spend more time with my

granddad. But he could not sever us permanently. There was magic in those moccasins, Indian spirit that would wrap my feet and connect me with the Great Mother, Earth, and my Creator. When I needed it the most, I would slip on my moccasins, glide out the door and walk the woods. In rain and snow and summer sweetness, I would walk and talk to Creator, and I would grow. A fantasy of being an Indian Warrior Woman, full of courage and pride bloomed in me the moment I put on my turquoise and my moccasins and walked the land. When my stepfather's raging became unbearable, I would narrowly escape destruction of my heart and soul by stealthily slipping into the woods, as a warrior would, without a sound.

In the woods I would imagine I could hunt and provide for myself. I would live off the land and not fear, or feel alone. In my Cherokee moccasins I would lay in peace in a field of high grass and watch the summer sky or visit the stream, hunting for crayfish. I felt safe and free. The land did not rage at me, and the birds and the animals did not molest me. The sun warmed my core and the stream sang to me. I would remember my visits to the Great Smoky Mountains, and I was comforted.

Every Christmas I would get a new pair. Then, when I married, Granddad sent me a simple handmade blanket. It is his people's symbol for marriage. A blanket wrapped around the couple represents their joining.

The last night, in the diner I told him what his gifts had meant to me. I tried to tell him that he sent me life. In a scary, lonely childhood, he had sent me peace, connection and protection. His dark eyes filled, and I saw the only hint of deep emotion I've witnessed flicker in his eyes. This is when he spoke to me of his life.

His mother had gone to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. There she married a white, because she didn't want her children to be so dark. Dark meant discrimination and poverty. When his father died while he was young, his mother sent him back to the reservation to go to boarding school. Before graduation, World War II broke out and he lied about his age to get in the Marines. At Okinawa he was shot, and returned to the Naval Station in Norfolk, VA at the age of 18. There my Nana roped him into getting married, as he put it, and so there he stayed. Cherokee was nothing more than a shamle town then, very poor and barren. He was better off staying where he was. His new wife wasn't at all interested in living on a reservation. He worked at the Naval Ship Yard, and when his buddies learned his heritage, they dubbed him "Chief." "Can you make it rain for us Chief?" they teased him constantly. He felt humiliation where his pride belonged. Considering that up until World War II, Indians were not allowed to vote in North Carolina, granddad was better off in Virginia, despite the jokes. He, like many Indians in the 1950's stayed away from the reservation and integrated into mainstream society. But he wasn't happy. His first marriage disintegrated. My mother, her sister, and two brothers

were left behind, although he maintained a close relationship with them. He met another woman and he eventually married again.

It was the early 70's when he became overwhelmingly restless. He was hearing about Tribal Community Planning, and the revitalization of his people. Across the country there were many movements for Indian rights. It was a time of great change for the Indian. Tribes needed those who had left to return and help the councils become educated and business oriented. He knew he had the experience. His tribe needed people who could lead. He talked to his wife, but she wanted no part of it. The more he tried to resist, and stay with his wife and family, the more he felt possessed. His culture was not welcomed where he lived. He had suppressed his heritage as to not draw undue jokes and insults. Now, instead of cowering, he felt the need to stand tall, return to the mountain and play a vital part in preserving it. He would be free to live as the red man he was. He had tried very hard to fit into the white world, but now it was more and more apparent, he belonged in Cherokee. He dreamed of Junaluska, Tsali, and Sequoyah, three tribesmen who gave service to the people. Tsali, a warrior against the removal, gave his life so the Indians hiding in the mountains would be given the land in which they hid. These men haunted granddad's dreams. They begged him to come home.

Eventually his wife told him to go, she had someone else, and "Who could blame her," he said, "I was not the man she married." I had totally transformed into an unhappy stranger obsessed by the ghosts of my ancestors. I had to go home.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will be landing in 15 minutes, please return your seats to their upright positions."

Home - I was almost home. I opened my eyes and looked out over the land. It had been that way for me too, this trip. Something had possessed me. I could not sleep until I returned to those mountains. I had told my husband, "I just have to go." I had scraped the plane fare together and bought the ticket. Once there, I had to jump into the stream and feel the chill, and go to the drama, and visit the broken down shack where Mrs. Bigmeat had lived and eat fried bread with Granddad. I had to tell him about his gift to me, the awakening of my soul. Why? Why had nothing mattered but my getting there? Because like him, my soul walks in beauty in the mountains of the principal people.

Louise "Toni" Ruddy

Joy Coming Up In The Morning

Everyone said she was beautiful. I couldn't see it. To me she was ugly as sin. Her existence was created by sin and I wasn't sure if I could ever learn to love her. I was alone, looking at her, staring. She was tiny and needy in that incubator, wanting to be picked up and begging for the affection I couldn't give. She cried, swung her fist in the air to demand the love she desperately wanted, and I just looked at her. I couldn't bear the thought of touching her, seeing her face was painful enough. Her every movement made me remember and remembering was something I hated.

I honestly, I don't remember the attack. I guess that's good. But I do remember the ugly things before it. My heart was racing with fear instead of passion. I remember the disgusting weight of him, and his disgusting breath. In my nightmares I felt the weight of him on top of me before it happened. I remember my terror and his face. He had eyes like cold blue steel. I remember screaming, calling out for help. I screamed until I lost my voice but no one heard me. No one came. Then I found out I was having his child, the child of a stranger. I was thirteen and terrified. His child was the last thing I wanted. I convinced myself that it was a monster growing inside of me. I hated my body's betrayal. I'd cry each time I felt her move inside of me and cursed my self expansion. "Mommy, it's moving, I feel it inside me, like him mommy. I don't want it." I thought it would be as evil as the man who planted it within me. My mother didn't agree. "It's my grandchild. It's a baby and a part of you, it will be beautiful like you are. It needs you, you have to grow together now, honey." I'd cry, my arms folded, my bottom lip poking out; "I don't want it!" I remember my mother said it was human, it had a soul and a right to birth, but my heart was shattered. My innocence stolen, I didn't care about this creature's rights when mine had been violated. I asked her what I did to deserve this and she'd say, "Nothing baby. Nobody does anything to invite violence." I was a child carrying a child, resentment and pain. How could I be a mommy? I was a frightened little girl, I still needed my mommy. She just didn't understand, this thing would wound me as deeply as he did, it wouldn't be capable of anything else.

Now I see her, small and crying after kicking and forcing her way out of my body. I should have been angry, not her. Still it seems as if the child's screams are just her way of yelling at me. Maybe she thought this is my fault, like I was suppose to be able to forget how she got here and welcome her into my life. I couldn't, she wasn't invited. I couldn't do anything but turn away. I hated her, but she kept crying, that selfish baby. She wouldn't stop, I wouldn't comfort her. She yelled like I yelled and cried like I cried, but never lost her voice. I heard her. I watched, watched her squirm and wiggle, seeming to beg for mommy like I did when I need-

ed mine the most and she couldn't be there to save me. I looked at her tiny face, and actually saw her. I saw insight in my reflection. It wasn't her father. Maybe he repelled me from loving her at first, but he wasn't the reason why I couldn't touch her now. The hidden reason I wouldn't hold her, the one I was becoming forced to face was devastating. It was my mother, she was the reason

It was because when I told her what happened to me I watched her cry like she'd been victimized. She shook, her hands trembled, and she didn't comfort me. I guess she couldn't. I wanted her to hold me. I wanted that more than anything but she couldn't. Instead she cursed him. I'd never heard her curse before. She called him an animal, a beast. She sat on her bed and stared blankly into a corner so blinded by shock that she didn't really see it. I crumbled into another corner. I could see her vision was so distorted by tears that she didn't notice mine. I carried the weight of that agony alone. I know it wasn't her fault. It wasn't the child's fault and it wasn't mine. We all have to grieve. I wouldn't allow my grieving to victimize the innocent anymore. I shouldn't have let my child cry because I had. It was cruel. No one deserves to suffer alone. Accepting that knowledge broke my heart, and healed it. I'd never do that again. She'd never be alone and crying again.

Painfully, I lifted her into my arms and baptized her with my tears. I absorbed her pain into my own. She stopped crying. At that moment I heard my mother's tearful utter, "I was hiding, hoping, waiting for you to reach out to your child, Faith. I'm sorry I wish I could have... I couldn't. I believed in you, you're stronger. I knew you would have to..., it's what is human." She cradled me, as I cradled my child. I stopped crying. For the first time I understood this baby was a blessing, not a curse. A child is God's way of making the future right. She didn't belong to any attacker, she was mine. She was the innocence lost and comfort gained. She was beauty conceived of sin but not connected to it. I smiled, losing my sadness, thinking she was all the good in the world. My gift from above, my baby Joy, my daughter. She was warm and new like the morning, like tomorrow, and all the hope it has in it. I loved her. She'd always find me waiting with open arms when she needed to be held because I love her. Love makes connections that aren't severed as easily as cords. Rape couldn't even break our ties. I loved her, she was my child. I loved her with all my soul, as deeply as a woman, a mother can love a child. I always will. As I was the faith in my mother's life, she is the joy that makes me want to rise in the morning.

Keyana Barbour

Chest, Nuts: Roasting

The movie theatre on Christmas afternoon seemed different. For one thing, people talked louder before the movie than on other days. At least I thought they did. It was my first Yule Day film attendance, and my last with any luck. The old folks were on the West coast breaking into the few gifts I could afford, left under the Oregon-grown spruce. I was in the East looking for work. Certified in the culinary art, health food only. Passed the bar a long time ago, but never practiced. Don't take any crap. That's why I get fired on a regular basis.

The truth is I was lonely and prayed that seeing the "Star Trek" movie for the second time in three weeks would kill Christmas for me, not just the hours, but the burning heart. Curiosity, too, pressed me to see if I'd like the picture even more this time. Been a Trekie since the '60s. I even met Leonard Nimoy once.

My blue-jeaned self settled into an end seat about one-eighth the way down the left aisle in an AMC multiplex somewhere in Delaware County, southwest of Philadelphia. One look at the screen and I was ready to be energized with full phasers and shields raised, but the watch half way up my arm said, relax, we're twenty minutes early, 'Captain' Willie.

Now generally, I'm not too fussy about things except maybe my cooking. But I do hold to two 'golden rules' in life. One isn't all that important; has something to do with treating other people to lunch if you owe them money. The other rule, the big one, is 'silence is golden in the movies.' It's O.K. to talk before the previews, but keep it low and indiscernible. I don't care to hear what someone's favorite movie of all time is, which nursing home they're sticking their old man in, or how much they adore the person who has a tongue pivoted in their ear. And it's nobody's damn business what I'm tellin' the lucky person sitting next to me about the fantastic new secret recipe I'm creating for my next employer. But both my sacred codes were about to become charbroiled cow-parts and potatoes. Then again it was Christmas, and there should have been a truce.

Two nincompoops pulled into the row behind me and sat at midway. I could hear, as could anyone, their discussions about stocks, bonds and business. But they soon switched topics to a lady friend who, they believed, could no longer have fun in life.

"Bert, what do ya mean she can't do anything? You mean she can't have sex?" a big mouth, later identified as Henry's, said. For a Christmas afternoon, sex seemed too important to Henry. Obviously, he was the kind of guy who kept his bagels toasted.

"For Christ's sake, Henry," Bert moaned with some disgust. It wasn't clear if sex was unpalatable to Bert or the lady, or if I had misread Henry and that perhaps he didn't own a toaster. "She's a vegetarian, so she can't go to any restaurants. What kind of life is that?"

I couldn't believe my ears. This ozone-meister was making fun of vegetarians? I'd been living off Brussels sprouts and raisin bread for six years! (All right, so I soak 'em in butter on weekends.) These were 'cooking words' where I come from. If there had been a paring knife and an oak cutting board nearby, I'd have carved Bert's zucchini into a swan. But then, that's why I got fired from my second restaurant job. I threatened the owner because he wanted to change one of my recipes.

"Ugh. When did she become a vegetarian?" Henry wondered.

"When?" Bert chided. "Who cares about when. How about why?"

"All right. Why?"

"I don't know why. I mean, I'm just wondering," Bert said as he made wriggling sounds to get free from the discomfort of not knowing. "And she eats no sweets. Can you believe that?"

"You're kidding."

"What can you buy a woman on her birthday, or before a date if she doesn't eat sweets. And that limits the places that she will go to, you know, like candy stores, ice cream parlors, donut shops, and bakeries." There was panic in Bert's voice. He sounded like a loyalist in the pastry guard. A quick side glance confirmed either of these clowns could have been stand-ins for John Candy.

"Mmm, the bakery. The white creamed-filled donuts and a cup of black coffee." Henry sounded like he was having a wet dream, and I was glad I was looking forward.

"What the hell got into her?" was Henry's mock anger. I imagined he blamed women for everything, especially for vegetables. And it was clear now that only carnivores talked so loud. Must be the spirits of the dead animals callin' up from the belly. (Was munchin' from a bag of sliced carrots, myself, via an inside pocket.)

"I couldn't tell ya what got into her," Bert said with the sad distaste of someone who'd just licked the outside of a raw potato. "She doesn't drink either, Henry. She won't go to parties, New Year's Eve gigs, nightclubs, or bars."

"Well, what does Isaac, say? He's the one dating her, right?"

"You know Isaac," Bert needlessly reminded Henry in a way that besmirched Isaac as the boob in their gang. "He says she's a lot of fun." Bert burst into laughter with Henry tagging a close second. They did this with such force that I could've sworn my right eardrum soloed for five minutes. Eager to strangle both these jerks, I then remembered why I got fired the sixteenth time: crumpled a waiter's neck with both hands after he shouted an order for tangerine mousse parfait in the same ear. Figured I better calm down.

"How about you? Have you met her, Bert?"

"Sure, of course. I know her well, from years ago when she was a party animal, Henry, if you know what I mean." At least sixty people knew what he meant by this time.

"Well?"

The theatre grew still, like a circus as the acrobat triple somersaults.

"She's nice. Very nice, girl. I like her."

Somebody giggled from the back. In my younger day, I'd have slapped both these pokes until their jowls tenderized. But that's why I got fired from my third and tenth jobs, just because (3rd) I wanted to straighten out Mr. Dishwasher for breaking my favorite fondue server, and (10th) a delivery punk asked for a signature while I was softening white chocolate in a double boiler. Instead, I felt guilty about the coach-class airfare I stole from the household Christmas fund to travel to Philly. My anger was swallowed with the next carrot. Henry and Bert switched back, quietly, to spending trends and mutual funds, though I wished they had been beamed onto the Klingon home planet.

Another conflict started in my row to the far right, just in time to pick up the slack after Henry and Bert. I'm sure these folk wanted me to feel like family. They reminded me squarely of Thanksgiving dinner with the folks. Later, I realized this could've been a great Three Stooges' short.

A young woman was taking her father to task, in absentia, for cutting off her use of the family credit card. This parent-bashing was done in the presence of a boyfriend, or date, and the single most universally accepted wrong person to have on a date with you next to a priest, minister or rabbi — her mother.

"Who the hell does he think he is?" the young girl bitched, her long, straight black hair bouncing on and off each side of her face, like you imagine it did on all those Egyptian girls whose effigies-in-profile are badly brushed inside the pyramids.

"I don't know, Ellana," the date/boyfriend said without committal, which was pretty smart with Mom sitting right there. He probably realized that every word of the conversation could get back to the 'Dad-king.' (I'm guessing at the girl's name. He only said it that one time while plied with popcorn, the buttery kind. The girl's name, in reality, sounded more like 'Ebla-ebla,' but I'm trying to be nice.)

"Now, honey, you know your father is wound up about work," Mommy said.

"I don't give a rat's corpuscle about his work." Ellana spit a piece of puff, seed, gold tooth, or something into the gray hair of the old lady in front of her, then got an octave higher. "What about that cashmere sweater I wanted? I told everybody in the lab I was going to treat myself to cashmere for Christmas."

Her head jerked forward to swallow back a snicker over her particle bombardment into the

old woman's hair. Her mother also looked, saw the particle had done no real harm, then waved her right hand silently in front of Ellana's face, giving the "don't worry about it" signal.

"Honey, your father's not made of it."

"Oh, thanks for your support, Mother." She coated the cliché with inches of sarcasm, but poured hemlock into the parental label. She then dashed the popcorn from her date's offering hand and smacked into her ancestor's chest, popping several corns onto her mother's coat and lap.

"God, I hate my father," she moaned to the movie-going public.

Mom was picking the kernels from her garb and placing them in her mouth one at a time. As she bent forward to do this, I could see a popcorn puff crowning her coiffure. It attained that great height either from an olympian leap out of the box just shoved at her, or from some kid in the back, of which there were many. But sensors had not detected any popcorn launches from the rear.

Ellana also saw it and she took on a look that bespoke of enduring burning coals in her nose and throat, thereby running the risk of curing her nasal voice quality, before revealing the secret. 'Justice had reigned,' I'm sure she thought.

"I hate your father, too, dear," Mother agreed in a definite, if nonchalant, patronizing fashion.

"I'll buy you the sweater, love," her hero spoke as he methodically reached for the popcorn, never taking his eyes from the advertising stills of local businesses that flashed on the screen for the thirty-seventh time. Ellana lit like a white Christmas tree with a million bulbs. She gave him a hug and kissed his cheek.

"Thank you, lover." Her eyes melted into an economic pool of pleasure. The date patted the arm about his neck that, to me, resembled part love, part wrestling hold.

"Sure. No need to complain, I'll take care of it. Just shut up about the sweater. OK?"

An 'I love you' was said back to him a little too loud, too showy, for a proclamation devoid of accuracy.

The man smiled, not a hero's smile of humility and gratitude. It wasn't love either. Perhaps he sensed something. He smiled a pirate's smile, a smile from a swashbuckling adventure movie, like when the buccaneer buried a rich cache in the sand so he alone knew where it was, and planned to go to it later to play with it for all it's worth, because he owned it. Haarr.

Ellana munched corn. The date reached for the container without looking. Her mother, who watched their romantic display with agitation, grabbed for the popcorn, staring hard at her co-date. Their hands caught container and yanked against each other. The man kept looking forward. His expression changed to fear. His mouth stopped in mid-chew. The mom faced

him, and therefore, me. From that angle they became a medium-close shot from an Ingmar Bergman film. Mom's right brow dropped low to nearly shut the eye. Her left brow jumped to the black ceiling tiles and dug in like a dozen Zulu spears. Ellana let go, eager for a good Mom/date fight, thank you.

The tug began. The box started to elongate and was about to blow when two patrons excused themselves and barged past the trio into the seats between them and me.

When the butts cleared, Ellana held the box of popcorn and a smirk. Mom was teacher; the date, castrated.

Conclusion? I figured it out on my own. Hell, I've been fired nineteen times, and the soap operas have filled in where my 'C' in psychology left off. Momma taught daughter how to win the scepter of dominance over any male that tried to bribe her with money. (That's bull. I just made it up.) I was just glad they shut up, because their matriarchic attitudes were disrespectful to the late Gene Roddenberry, the Father of Star Trek.

But if boyfriend was done for, so was I from listening to them.

It was only a few minutes from the 2:15 start of the previews that I hoped would lighten the holiday atmosphere which was unduly deadened here in the East. As the battle ended on the right, however, the front erupted. The whole movie-going experience was imploding from a should-be holiday treat, to a U.S.O. Bob Hope relief show between kamikaze attacks.

This was a one-sided, I mean a son-sided skirmish. Mother and son, (on break from whining family and obnoxious relatives, I bet), made ready to enjoy "Star Trek," a story oozing with hope for the future and tolerance in the present. At the very least, I mused, Christmas Day, the quintessential representation of peace on the planet, lent support by the good-guys-always-win Star trek, would soften the most minutia-laden hearts.

Wrong as an L.A. peep show.

The son had recently returned from a mission to the snack bar. A gigantic soda was plopped into the drink holder between the two dark red seats that he and Mom held. An already unwrapped candy bar was passed to Mom as he began unwinding his own.

"My God, Ma," the son began innocently enough, "you should've smelled this guy in the snack line." The son was another loud talker. Don't these damn Easterners ever listen to themselves in the shower? I was thinking of doing junior, here, the honors, keeping him face-down in the tub, of course. But a similar ordeal got me canned two weeks ago when a "waitress," who was seducing me in the men's room, turned out to be a guy.

"Did he stink!" He bit his candy bar. I think it was one of those giant, movie-size Nestle's Crunch bars, at least I pretended it was, since I used to like them when I was young and foolish, and the loud snap sounded familiar. He waited for Mom's remark or rebuttal. Mom was

too busy chewing.

"He was an old guy, looked like Uncle Mike with the big head and all, out in the lobby. Ma, he smelled just like a cheap cigar."

That meant something to Mom.

Mom grunted. This grunt had to be a Mom trademark. It didn't echo like a friendly grunt, though no blood spewed from her ears, either. It was definitely more than a burp, but less than a shotgun blast. Maybe her husband, or late-husband, or ex-husband, or legally separated husband, or working husband, or missing husband smoked cigars, and smoked them well, displaying a stately reserve or cavalier flamboyance. Maybe he smoked them so much that Ma couldn't see seventeen-inches in front of her bushy hair while trudging around a kitchen that had turned from designer teals and mauves to catgut-brown thanks to cigar fog. Maybe this kid was illegitimate. Hell, all I really knew for sure was that I had a helluva lot of time to wonder about grunts and smoke, and that I'd have to plead temporary insanity for my upcoming berserk actions against these damn Easterners if they didn't start the previews soon.

Of course, I didn't smoke. Hated smoke, myself. It made me woozy, like this kid's conversation.

"And I mean a real cheap cigar, Ma. You know what I'm talkin' about?" He didn't wait. "I'm talkin' about those fifty cent stogies at the Seven-Eleven. Whew. That stink could kill a dog at twenty paces. What the hell's wrong with people. Especially on Christmas."

His total knowledge of carefully assembled panatellas, cheroots and perfectos might have brimmed a humidor, but he never mentioned it. The shining son, by my view from three seats back, had been trying to get his life-fires going for no more than twenty-five years. At this rate, my guess was he'd need twenty-five more just to find a match.

"I don't mind," he flickered on, "if they smell like a good cigar. If they spend a dollar, or a dollar and a quarter, it's not too bad. But, I mean, to stand in a movie lobby and smell like a fifty cent cigar is just plain pukey." It was at that point I decided to get this kid's address and send him a thesaurus as a belated Christmas gift. "A dollar seventy-five, that's all it would take for a really, really good cigar, and a good smell, don't you think, Ma?"

Ma leaned back with effort, letting her head roll from side to side in a feeble stretch. Fatigue, as a description, came to mind. Her stooped shoulders cried of disappointments and hard times. She moved forward a little, then started to lean toward junior, ready and eager (I hoped) to give him the third degree, or some what for, or at least a public speaking lesson. But a spark of light and the crack of the Dolby-fed speakers in the four corners of the room pushed Ma back against the seat again. She never said boo.

The previews started. The only thing that could have made me happier was a tablespoon

of Pepto Bismol.

But like a fallen souffle, one of my defense-shields dropped and a crushing awareness battered my deadpan like a custard pie. These folk all sounded like me at one time or another on Christmases past. And I wasn't happy about it.

I promised myself a long look in the mirror once back in Oregon, to see if any of my personality had been stolen. I think I could sue `em for copyright infringement.

All was calm. People lost themselves in the hints of the great stories to come next month, next spring, next summer. I can't prove that, but they did stop yapping.

The "Star Trek" movie began. I hoped the audience was completely gone. I was. I always was.

It would have been nice if, when we returned from reverie, the world had changed, like in the movies, all by the snap of a projector switch. And if not the world, then perhaps a few minds would become a bit more owner-controlled. Like me and my new resolutions, for instance: no more making fun of idiotic Earth people, and no more being fired so that I don't have to trudge cross country to find work at Christmas. No more.

After flick-watching, I took a position in the rest room line for a shot at the porcelain. Daydreams mixed in about whether the film had grown in my estimation, and whether I had. Then, those two bozos clumped against the faux ceramic tile behind me, talking about that girl who became a vegetarian. Three hours ago, I'd have jammed a cleaver into the wall between them, or tossed an olive oil-soaked, flaming towel at their heads, like I did for my seventh and fifteenth firings, when (7th) a blind man insisted on bringing his smelly dog into the dining room, and (15th) that nun dared suggest my cheesecake was runny.

Instead, I prayed they'd 'live long and prosper.'

THE END

Gerard J. Medvec