

Gardner Newsletter

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“May the Christ of Christmas enfold you in His love, and may you walk with Him all the moments of your life!”



By: Rev. Dan Whitney

By the time this musing reaches the light of day, we will have either confirmed our support for the current president or will have selected an alternative to take his place. The hard task of making choices seems to invade my thoughts continually.

I confess, this presidential race seems more difficult to me, from the perspective of discernment, than others I have experienced. I have three books from the library on my desk right now. I have listened to debates, read editorials, and talked to friends. It seems I have more trouble getting at the truth. I suspect that some who read this will want to argue with me and say that the choice has never been clearer. And some of the folks who think that way will have voted for different candidates. I guess what is really troubling me is the hunch that I have, this sneaking suspicion, that my choice is more informed by the information I receive, and that often, the information that actually gets to me is controlled by others who have specific agendas for the kinds of information that is released.

On a most basic level, it is hard to find the specific information I want, in

a fashion that I can believe. Let me explain. My new home has about five hydrangea plants in the flower beds. These are a little unruly, and the first year we lived here, I simply dead-headed the plants at the end of fall. During the following summer, I asked some folks about how to prune hydrangeas. Unanimously they told me that hydrangeas only flower on new wood, so I should cut them back severely in the fall. So I waited, until today.

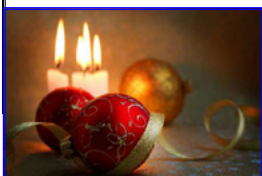
As I was charging the clippers for my foray into the world of shrubbery, I decided to check on-line to see if there were any specific tips on how to do this pruning. Turns out I have “lacecap” hydrangeas, and this variety of hydrangea sends out its buds for next year at the end of the current year. If I trim back the bush now, it won’t flower next year. I waited too long. It is too late. Now I will have to endure another year of out-of-control growth, or a year of no blossoms. I didn’t do the research at the right time. I learned the truth too late. I relied on what others said, rather than investing the time myself to make sure I knew the truth.

I confess, this has happened to me

more than once in my life. When Nancy and I were living in our first apartment in Michigan, we had some trouble with our landlord. At the beginning of one month, I wrote our landlord a letter stating that I was tired of having snow blow in under the front door leaving us small snow drifts in the middle of our living room (some as much as six inches high!) I stated that if this wasn’t fixed within the month that we would be leaving at the beginning of the next month. After all, we were paying the heating bill Nothing happened by the end of the month, so we moved to a new apartment, requesting our security deposit be returned to us.

Our landlord refused. He stated that we were required to notify him in writing that we were leaving and intended to terminate the lease. In those pre-computer days, I didn’t think to make a copy of the letter, so I couldn’t prove I had written anything. He stated that he had received a maintenance request, and that he would eventually get around to it, but that we had never terminated our agreement. So he kept our money. We were poor, and I was angry.

But I didn’t know that I should have



Continued on page 5....



Here is our exclusive interview with Katrina Joy Jenkins!

1. What's your favorite part of what you do? Your least?

The wonderful (and sometimes daunting) problems I get to solve, the creativity and the process of telling a story through all the intimate details, and the amazing people and places I get to experience make every day at work worth the headache of creating a visual story. I have seen the inner workings of every crevice of a mall on "Mall Cop" I have worked at the Crane Estate on a TV pilot and at Blithewold Mansion on the show "Body of Proof." I have explored every inch of the Franklin Park Zoo while working on "Zookeeper." I have worked in fine homes and in rough neighborhoods. I have decorated boats, airplanes, cars, SWAT vehicles and junkyards.

Whether I am working on a commercial, a TV series, a promotional piece, an Indy movie or a major motion picture, the deadlines are always difficult, - the

schedules, therefore, packed and the stress level high. I don't always like what my job does to my personal life. Right now my mom and my Aunt Raylene and my cousins and siblings are in Vermont at the cabin enjoying the summer, but I am trapped in Boston because the actress on the movie I'm working on is starting a TV show forcing us to finish the film on a Saturday-Wednesday schedule with Thursday and Friday off (if we're lucky). It's also difficult to be a freelancer. Many folks in different fields know the fear of not knowing what or when your next project will be. Fortunately, and sometimes unfortunately, the movie industry is very unionized which means health and dental benefits for most of its workers, a blessing to be sure.

2. Why do you think Americans (and the world) are fascinated with movies and stars? Do you think our "obsession" is unhealthy?

Storytelling is as old as human speech, as much a part of us as our personalities, our friendships

and our family histories. It's a connection to our past, a window to our future and a tie to each other no matter where we are from. Moviemaking is just an extension of the earliest creation stories told around a fire and the cave paintings left for future generations to discover and contemplate. It is history; it is art; it is discovery and it can be vile.

I think our obsession with fame is slightly ugly, especially in American society where it seems you can be famous for being famous. I do however believe that some of our attraction to famous people stems from the recognition of ourselves in them or in the characters they play. We like to live vicariously as our own desires are fulfilled in the stories we choose to watch. I've lately been thinking about facial recognition and how hard it is when someone we love gets Alzheimer's and can no longer remember loved ones. It's such a hardwired part of our brain; it helps us navigate our social world. How can we live and love without it? When we see faces over and over again, such as those of actors etc., they become familiar to us.

Continued on page 3





Continued from page 2.....

It's almost like we know them; and since they're familiar to the people around us as well, we can talk about them, bring them to our dinner tables and into our own life stories. I think some of that obsession is natural. Where the ugly part of this comes in is that this process sometimes deifies those who lead sordid little lives. Who wants to look up to someone who treats others badly or acts childish simply because they're so rich nobody can tell them "no?" It would be nice if our "obsession" with stars was rewarded with famous people who were shining examples of compassion and the radiance of a life well lived, wouldn't it?

I have met some nice actors, some strange ones and some who were just downright mean. It's a mixed bag, just like the rest of society, I suppose.

3. Do you think actors are generally more intelligent? Why?

No, I absolutely do not think that actors are more intelligent than the rest of the population. Usually they're just like the rest

of us. They are artists which takes a certain breed. I believe the good artists are just outside of normal, it allows them to make sharp and interesting commentary on the world around them. I think there are folks like Morgan Freeman (who I worked with on "Gone Baby Gone") who are consummate professionals and amazing artists and there are folks like Mel Gibson (who I worked with on "Edge of Darkness") who are stranger than strange and who don't treat others very well. There are people like Cameron Diaz ("The Box") and Adam Sandler ("Grown Ups 2") who are funny and kind to those they work with and there are people like Jack Nicholson ("The Departed") who are artistic, but high-maintenance and painful to deal with.

4. Strange requests?

The strange requests are sometimes built into the actors' contracts. It has to do with making themselves comfortable as they travel the country and the world from hotel to hotel and strange movie set to strange movie set. I'm not justifying it, but I certainly

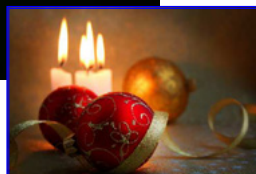
understand it more after working the hours and hard schedules we work in this industry.

I did a public service announcement with Billy Crystal once when I was a Production Assistant, the lowest rung on the entertainment industry ladder ... well at least you're paid when you're a PA - an intern, I suppose, is lower. (I did that too ha ha.) Well, I had to get grilled chicken at 7 in the morning to satisfy his contract. I couldn't find any place open even though I walked all up and down Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. So I went to McDonalds and ordered a couple of grilled chicken

sandwiches, took them apart, cut them up nicely and put them on a bed of greens, and cut tomatoes from the production refrigerator. It looked all right; but later when Billy laughed and thanked me for his chicken at 7 in the morning, I think he knew.

We had to do only red M&M's for Norah Jones on the movie "Ted" last summer. We decorated the green room under the Hatch Shell in Boston and wanted to make it authentic to what her contract said. I feel like that was put in there as a joke though because that's one of those things people laugh about when they hear an actor or

Continued on page 4.....





Thanks to Katrina Jenkins for her interview. Katrina is the daughter of Cousins Gloria and Bob Parsons and is the granddaughter of Original Gang of Ten member, Raymond Gardner.

Thanks to Rev. Dan Whitney who is the pastor of the Manchester, CT Church of the Nazarene and who is married to Cousin Nancy. Nancy's mother was Elinor Cove, one of the "Original Gang of Ten."

Continued from page 3

musician requires it. Plus, the candy shops sell them in individual colors now so it's not so hard to get (picture me sorting through a million bags of M&M's just to get the red ones out ha ha).

Martin Sheen's agent called the production office during "The Departed" and asked me to make sure that he didn't know about any of the Iraq war protests going on in Boston because he'd probably get himself arrested. I found that Mr. Sheen himself was very courteous, however, when he called the office. (I've never worked with crazy Charlie Sheen.)

Jack Nicholson's teamster, Chet, called the office because he couldn't change a flat tire and instead left the rented Towncar in the middle of downtown Boston to accumulate tickets. I wanted to go down and change the tire myself to put him to shame. A Teamster who can't or won't change a tire - come on!

5. What are your future goals?

I'm still not sure what I want to be when I grow up but I really do love decorating sets. It's not your everyday kind of decorating; you have to make everything real. You don't always stage a place to look it's best, sometimes you stage it to look its worst or just to make a kitchen feel lived in with a few messy plates and handwriting on the refrigerator and a crayon scribble on the wall where the toddler can reach. I am in the

process of trying to produce an Indy film with a co-worker of mine. It's not easy to pull all the individual strings together to make it happen. So who knows if I'll ever make it a reality, but it keeps me busy when I'm not employed on somebody else's project. I like the idea of becoming a producer because you get to be in from the ground floor. You pick the script and bring in a director and find the actors and the places that will make it come alive. It's creative but it takes someone who understands the business side of things as well. Maybe that's what I'll be. Or maybe I'll grow up and get a real job so I know what my income will be every year and so that my summers aren't so incredibly hectic. The jury's out on that one. All I know is that I need some creativity, some problem solving, and a little bit of stress in my life and work to feel alive.

6. What are your feelings about explicit scenes, language and violence? Do you feel movies are obligated to portray all of this for the sake of realism?

I think that people are always trying to push the envelope. It's not new and it's not always great for society. Sometimes change is good. Sometimes change and pushing boundaries is not so good. I like realism in my movies if that's what the story calls for. I spend a lot of time filling out forms on desks and lending my handwriting to notes on the wall, putting dirty shoes by the door, dead bugs in the glass of outdoor lights, and sawdust around

the floor of a workshop when I do a set. You, the viewer, may not even notice it; but if it weren't there, you might miss it or feel that the set was a set. I feel like it helps the actors act their parts better too because it gives them a real sense of place. So, in some ways, I am a total advocate of reality in film. I do believe that those who are not students of history are doomed to repeat it.

Our storytelling can be cautionary as we realistically portray things that we hope will never happen again. To me, it all boils down to the personal responsibility of the viewer. It's the responsibility of the viewer to select stories that he or she wants to watch and can handle and it's the responsibility of the movie ratings board to rate movies so that people understand what it is they are going to see or bring their children to.

Just like art, movies can go too far, but those that do are usually not commercial successes. The movie genre that makes the most money is still the comedy. Ultimately, it's a commercial enterprise, although a great amount of art goes into the making of a film or TV show. What the public wants, is what the the public gets for good or bad.



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Continued from page 1.....

written a second letter. I didn't know that I should have made a copy of the first letter. I thought the messages I had left were enough. I thought that what I knew was sufficient. I believed I had acted in good faith, and I assumed that everyone else would do the same.

Someone once said, "What you don't know can't hurt you." I beg to disagree. What you don't know can kill you . . . or if not that drastic, cause you to lose money, live with out-of-control hydrangeas, or be forced to endure a president who doesn't know what he is doing.

In the book of Romans (1:18), the author argues that human beings should know that there is a God based on the magnificence of the creation around them. The creation is evidence that there is a God, according to Paul. But that doesn't mean that we understand everything there is to know about God from creation. Affirming that there is a god is a whole lot different than understand what kind of god the creator is.

We might have a disinterested god, or a dualistic evil/good god, or a Zeus-like or Shiva-like god. Where do you get the information on this kind of thing? Wikipedia has lots of listings for gods. There is plenty of information around, and most of your neighbors have some sort of opinion. Where do you go to get the kind of truth you can use? How do you make choices based on truth, rather than on the opinions of other, non-experts like yourself?

This is hard, because belief in God always requires some measure of faith. If that were not so, if the existence of God and the truth of his Word were completely undeniable, then compliance would be required and our ability to choose would be decimated. When we deal in the realm of faith, we always start in the world

of probability and witness. We ask ourselves questions like, "How might we have gotten such an unlikely book as the Bible?" and "What was the source of the faith of our forefathers?"

Pastors like me believe that God plays a role in raising questions about himself in the recesses of our minds. We believe that God raises the "god-question" inside of us . . . to invite us to make choices. So that in the end, we have to come to a decision about what we believe about truth, about who we are, about how we got here, and about what we are meant to do. Most of all, we must decide where we are headed.

So how do you negotiate the landscape? How do you get the answers you need?

Here is where Jesus helps me. He must know how confused I am about all of this. And He must know that I am not the only one confused. He must be tired of all the legends and myths we create to help us figure out what God must be like. So He does the only reasonable thing, the only definitive thing He can do to settle the question.

He comes to show us what He looks like.

There is a little old lady who lives in the home next to mine. I had been trying to meet her for several weeks after our arrival, and wasn't having much success. I was beginning to think that she was afraid to answer the door, because she didn't know who I was.

So I took a picture of myself that was printed in a church document, wrote "Sorry I missed you" on it, and taped it to her front screen door. I figured that the next time I visited, she would at least know who I was, and maybe I would get the chance to meet her. At 91 years of age, I thought she might like my help from time to time.

Continued on page 8.....



Katrina Parsons

Working Her way Up to Leadman

By: Mike Sullivan

(Reprinted from the November 12th issue of www.imagineneeds.com, Page 12)

Leadman – it's one of those "what-the-heck-do-they-do" film credits, like Best Boy or Key Grip, that rolls by at the end of every movie. Even some of us in the industry can be struck dumb when asked about it. So, for your convenience, here are two quick facts about the Leadman: (1) The Leadman is responsible for dressing all the sets on a production. (2) Despite the old-school Hollywood appellation, the Leadman is not necessarily a man.

I recently spent some time with Katrina Parsons, the only female Leadman currently working on union jobs in New England, about the skills, details and particulars that make up a Leadman. Falling under the umbrella of the Art Department, the Leadman is directly supervised by the Set Decorator and is, in turn, the supervisor of the swing gang (another great title!) and/or set dressers. "It's really an administrative job. On a typical movie I'm in charge of two trucks (three trucks or more on busy days) with Teamsters and set dressers driving around doing pickups and rental returns and getting all of the furniture/dressing to a given set. If I don't do my job right there is nothing there to film." (No pressure there.) In addition to scheduling, managing a crew, and working within a budget, the

Leadman also needs a good eye for detail, a firm understanding of the story and characters plus an incredible resourcefulness and aptitude for creative problem solving.

Katrina worked her way up the art department ranks on the sets of ZOOKEEPER, EDGE OF DARKNESS, THE COMPANY MAN, PAUL BLART: MALL COP as well as many low-budget Indies, TV movies and commercials. Since becoming Leadman she has run a crew on the first thirteen episodes of BODY OF PROOF, the hit comedy TED and Sandra Bullock's new movie THE HEAT, currently in Post.

Generally, one doesn't go to college with the dream of becoming a Leadman. It is one of those positions in the movie business that people find through any number of different avenues. Katrina grew up in North Reading, Massachusetts and attended Endicott College. With some forethought she decided to major in Communications, a degree that could lead to several possible career choices. "I wanted to be an artist, but not a starving artist," she said, "and I wanted work experience and a resume when I graduated." To that end Katrina took full advantage of Endicott's strong internship program. In 2002 she was interning at Scout Productions in Boston when they were producing the pilot for QUEER EYE FOR THE STRAIGHT GUY. Preparing the

apartment for that program would be Katrina's first official taste of creative set dressing.

Following college Katrina spent the obligatory amount of time as a PA and toiled in many production offices as a coordinator, bookkeeper and auditor. But those were all office jobs. "I could get an office job anywhere. Telling the story was the fun part, the creative part. That's what you can't get anywhere else." She knew the art department would help her scratch that creative itch, but she had one requirement – "It had to be here in Boston, because this is my home." This was at the same time Massachusetts enacted a new tax incentive that would attract the pecuniary eye of Hollywood. In 2006 Katrina joined I.A.T.S.E. Local 481 and began working on various shows as a set dresser and properties assistant.

These days Katrina is in charge of a crew and spends most of her time on the more mundane tasks of getting that crew and their trucks from here to there, but it is the time spent actually dressing the sets that Katrina still finds the most fun and rewarding. When it comes down to the small fine details of the set, "That's where I also get to play," she says. "Let's say it's a bar. You put yourself in the position of the bartender. Where is the DirectTV box and remote? There should be a million business cards tacked up over here. It's too clean. We need more bottles. We don't

Continued on Page 7

Katrina Parsons Working Her way Up to Leadman

Continued from Page 6

have enough empties. That’s the fun part.” Other important considerations include how the set will actually look onscreen once it has been lit and making sure the actor(s) will be comfortable on the set. “You want the actor to walk in and feel that they can be their character in that place.”

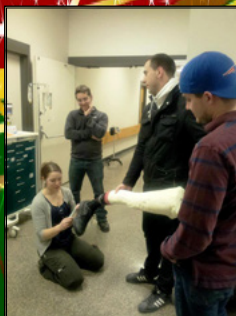
Whether it’s filling the closets of a teddy bear with tiny suits or tiny hangers for a tentpole summer comedy or creating a “pig-shrine-of-death” for a low-budget Lifetime horror movie, Katrina approaches every project as an artist first. “I do feel a responsibility to the integrity of the creative piece that is being put on the screen. At the end of the day, it’s about the creativity and the beauty of the product. You are making art.”

What is next for Katrina Parsons? Winter is usually slow. She has been lucky enough to get about one show a year when Hollywood comes to

town. She’s heard rumors that something might be happening in January, but so far they are still rumors. She waits for the phone to ring.

But, Katrina is also looking past Leadman to the next phase in her career, which looks like it may be producing. Katrina has been working with long-time co-worker and friend, Roger Danchik, raising funds for a low budget horror movie Roger wrote called APOTHEOSIS (look it up). They have made a trailer designed to give potential investors their idea of the look and feel of the film. “It’s got a total sci-fi/horror/thriller thing going on.”

Making films continues to be fun for Katrina. She still enjoys the challenge and charge of each new project, meeting new people and reuniting with old friends. “That’s the thrill of it that keeps you going. Every six months you’re doing a new job. My sister, who is a dental hygienist, would hate that. But I like it.”



“The three photos labeled ‘Apotheosis’ are from the fund raising trailer I produced last winter. We’re shopping the script and trailer around right now and trying to get money to make the whole movie.”



“May the Christ of Christmas enfold you in His love, and may you walk with Him all the moments of your life!”



Continued from page 5.....

We have visited together many times since then. She keeps that picture in her kitchen, with my phone number on it, just in case she needs to get me. She was so grateful to have a picture of me so that she knew who I was. And now, now that she knows who I am, I have a key to her house, in case there is an emergency.

At a minimum, the story of Bethlehem is an identification story. God had been telling the Jewish people who he was for centuries, but they kept getting the message garbled. Whether the confusion was intentional, conspiratorial or simply just “operator error” is beside the point. God knows that the only way to have a chance to achieve clarity is to put feet on the ground.

That is who Jesus is.

The author of the book of Hebrews pieces this together for us: (Hebrews 1:3)

The Son (Jesus) is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Jesus is the picture of God. When you look into the face of Jesus, you see God. Everything that God is, is wrapped up in Jesus. The compassion of God, the self-sacrifice of God, the empathy of God, the power of God, all of these are on display in the life of Jesus.

Back in the days before digital photography, I used to dabble in a dark room used for developing pictures. For those of you younger than 25, here is how it worked. You took light-sensitive paper out of a dark place, shined a light on it through a negative for a few seconds, then placed the paper in a fluid that caused the paper to react to the light. After the right amount of time had elapsed, you rinsed the paper and placed it in a fixative. This stopped the development process and “fixed” the image that was developing on the paper, so that it could now be brought out into the light of day without further development. If you forgot the fixative . . . the whole paper would turn dark black as soon as it was exposed to the light of day.

Much like the development of a photograph, God had been revealing himself for centuries. But when Jesus arrives, the photo is fixed, finished. Hold Jesus up to the light

. . . everything we need to know about God is perfectly revealed in Him.

There is no fear about bringing Jesus out into the light. He can bear the scrutiny. His life is an open book.

The apostle John says of Jesus, (John 1:9) The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus came so that we could get the truth about God. He came so that we could become sons and daughters of God. He came so that we would have all the information we would need to make the right choice – the choice to cooperate with His grace and mercy, and to embrace His mission of compassion for the world.

In our house we celebrate our decision by erecting a Christmas tree every December. The tree reminds us, by virtue of its ornamentation, that God has acted, and that we have received the intended revelation. We get it! Jesus has come! God is revealed! The choice is in our hands, and we have decided.

For once, we have no apprehensions about living with the consequences of our choices. For once, we have all the information we need to make the right choice. For once, we have no regrets.

Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings Ris’n with healing in His wings

See, He lays His glory by Born that man no more may die

Born to raise the sons of earth Born to give them second birth

Hark! The herald angels sing “Glory to the newborn King!”

May the Christ of Christmas enfold you in His love, and may you walk with Him all the moments of your life!

