



(The Christmas Column that Almost Wasn't)

Readers, I'm in a bind. I'm determined to produce a Christmas column. Something meaningful. Something inspiring. Something you might clip out and send to your mother. I really *need* to write something like that. I'm guessing you really need to read something like that. Something that will warm your heart, quiet your mind, cut through the droning cacophony that's the soundtrack of our age...

But here's my dilemma. So far – for me, anyway – Christmas is just adding to that droning cacophony. I keep thinking it should be the *antidote*, but it keeps feeling more like the disease. For one thing, there's been too much of it, too soon. A few nights ago (while still November!), "Rudolph" and "The Grinch" were both on TV – same time, different networks. Meanwhile, a third network featured the Tree Lighting Ceremony in Times Square. My daughter wanted to watch them all, so we clicked from one to the other to the other. Thanks to our fancy TV set, we could even watch one on the big screen while watching another in the top right-hand corner. Pretty neat, huh?

Not exactly. It was more like a blur. We didn't really *see* any of it. We certainly didn't *feel* any of it.

As I write this, Beaufort's festive trio – Night on the Town, Light Up the Night, and the Christmas Parade – looms on the immediate horizon. By the time you read it, we'll all be up to our eyeballs in Holiday Cheer. The shoppers will be shopping, the parties will be hopping, the hustlers bustling, and the jingle bells rockin'.

Uncomfortably Numb

Written by Margaret Evans

And I'm tired just thinking about it.

Actually, "tired" isn't the right word. The right word, I think, is "numb." I shudder to even type these words – to commit them to paper, where they seem so real – but I think I've finally been desensitized to Christmas.

You may say, "Big deal, join the club," but for me, this is terrible! I'm a Christmas person! I'm not one of those moody, broody types who feel sad around the holidays; that happens to other people, not me! Of course, "sad" is no more the right word than "tired." Christmas is not making me "sad." Sadness is an actual emotion, and would come as a relief. Again, "numb" seems to cover it pretty well.

Even my daughter is strangely unmoved this year. She can't seem to muster up a decent Wish List. She doesn't pour through the catalogues as zealously as she used to. (There are too many of them! Were there always *so many*?) And the toy commercials come so fast and furious, whizzing by with their bright images and rock n' roll riffs. Amelia says this one's "kinda cool" or that one "seems okay," but none of them make it to the Wish List. We sit at the computer together, googling "toys for girls" and both our eyes glaze over as pages and pages of possibilities appear. "I just don't know what I want anymore," she sighs, sounding eerily like a middle-aged woman complaining to her therapist.

I think my daughter's problem is two-fold: #1) She's jaded. Too many toys have betrayed her in years past, failing to live up to their considerable hype. (The Slushy Machine... The Jewelry Maker... the dastardly Easy Bake Oven...) And # 2) Like the rest of us, she's simply overwhelmed. There are too many loud, sparkly choices coming at her from too many loud, sparkly directions. It's just too much. *Too much Christmas.*

But what do we expect? In this dazzling, technicolor culture of ours, there's too much *everything!*

Too many movies to see, too many articles to read, too many news stories to follow, too many ideas to explore, too many initiatives to initiate, too many opinions to opine, too many issues to dissect...

Even Christmas is an "issue" now, isn't it? You've got your conservatives firing up their

perennial “war on Christmas” meme, while your atheists are posting their “You KNOW it’s just a myth” billboards. You’ve got your Catholic League counter punching with its own billboard (“You KNOW it’s real”), and you’ve got thousands of bloggers weighing in on all sides. And then there are the talking heads of cable news, and the blowhards of the radio airwaves, and all the fans who call in, send e-mail, leave comments, etc. etc. etc....

Argh! There are just too many voices! Too many people sharing too many opinions about too many subjects in voices far too loud. And all of them so predictable. Nobody ever saying anything new. Anything surprising. It’s all just so... uninspired. And for me, as a columnist, it’s damn near paralyzing.

As I write this, I’m weighed down by the terrible knowledge that it’s just one of way too many “Christmas columns” you’ll read this season. They’re everywhere, after all, and only a mouse-click away. What could I possibly say that hasn’t been said a thousand times before, and a thousand times better? That question hangs on my heart like a shroud. My vision fails me. I limp along from line to line, paragraph to paragraph, without direction. My words refuse to take flight. They crawl like slugs. They stall.

So I skulk around the Internet for awhile, looking for something, *anything*, to help shake this creative ennui. I read some bits of this and that: Some musings about Michael Vick... an essay comparing Howard Roark from “The Fountainhead” to George Bailey from “It’s a Wonderful Life”... an article about Form-Based Code in Beaufort... a review of “Tangled.” It’s all well-written and
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be
interesting, but I remain – you got it – numb.

So, I spend some time editing the other columns for this issue. Several of our regulars have written about the holidays, and unlike their languishing editor, they’ve finished their work on time. Coach Ian from EarthFit is telling us how to avoid the dreaded “Holiday Cycle” (you know the one); Shelley from Dancing Dog is sharing her “Yogic approach” to the holidays, which includes lots of self-pampering. Vivian has written beautifully about remembering Christmases past; and Terry recommends we ride out the season with copious amounts of bubbly.

It all sounds good to me. What could I possibly add? Why do I even bother? And yet...

It's later the same night – column's still unfinished – and I'm reading to my daughter. Her teacher has assigned one of my old favorites, "A Wrinkle In Time," and we're snuggled in my bed, taking turns reading aloud to each other. Madeleine L'Engle's great character, Mrs. Whatsit, is speaking to the children about the Black Thing (evil), assuring them that, "All through the universe, it's being fought, all through the cosmos, and my, but it's a grand and exciting battle." Suddenly, I feel my heart quicken in my chest, and what Mrs. Whatsit says next steals my breath. The words are italicized, and they are not L'Engle's. I know them by memory, and yet I'm reading them for the first time... again.

"The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

And there it is. The voice. The quiet voice that silences all the other, louder voices. The one – the only one – that never grows stale, never grows trite, never leaves me numb. As a writer, I believe it's this living voice – the one that spoke the very world into existence – that gives me *my* voice. If I can't hear it – if I let the droning cacophony drown it out – I might as well be mute, because I have nothing to say.

So, once again, I'm reminded that I must *listen* for this voice if I want to find my own. It is the eternal melody of my life; if I can't hear it, how can I riff on it, or sing a descant? If I am deaf to this melody, I can hear no harmony, only discord, and even the sweet songs of Christmas will sound flat and hollow.

(I make a mental note to attend that Advent service in the morning, after all. Yes, it's in the middle of the workday. Yes, I'm on deadline. Yes, I have a million things to do. And, yes, I'm going.)

I pull up the blanket, huddle closer to my daughter, and we return to "A Wrinkle In Time." It's Amelia's turn to read, and she's doing a lovely job. My husband's in the living room, nodding off with the cats in his comfy chair by the tree. Across the street, our neighbors' Christmas lights twinkle like stars in a black sky. The night is cold, but it's warm beneath these covers, and I don't feel even the least bit numb.

All is calm. All is bright.

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