



By Margaret Evans

Candice Glover won *American Idol* last night, and I'm sitting here thinking that it feels like the day after Christmas. You know the feeling. All that collective excitement, anticipation and good will finally culminated in a day of great joy, and you got *just* what you wanted, and so did everybody else . . . and now what? It's bittersweet. (Or, maybe that's just me. I seem to specialize in bittersweet.)

Wasn't it beautiful the way Candice brought this town together? All the posters and banners everywhere, the viewing parties, Facebook postings, and fundraisers? I don't think I remember a better day in Beaufort than Candice's homecoming, when thousands upon thousands of us hauled ourselves downtown in the blustery rain to greet "our" girl and hear that marvelous voice ring out through our streets. I don't usually like crowds, but I sure liked that one. Such a wonderful spirit in the air – so much courtesy and cheer and genuine humanity on display.

Beaufort seems charmed lately, doesn't it? In just a couple of weeks, we've produced an *American Idol* and been named "America's Happiest Seaside Town" by Coastal Living Magazine. And just last week, we learned that a film incentives bill passed in Columbia, and it's likely to resuscitate the moviemaking industry here. Those who prefer that Beaufort remain America's best-kept secret are probably starting to sweat. Those of us who sympathize, but who have long been suffering in a stagnant economy, are sensing the sweet prickle of cautious optimism.

But for now, it's the day after Christmas, and I'm reflective. I'm thinking about those things that

bring people together (like music) and those things that tear us apart (like politics). I'm thinking about the special election we just came through – and all the nastiness and invective it engendered among folks who quite likely stood shoulder to shoulder at the Candice Glover homecoming concert, holding their cell phone lights to the darkening sky. I'm thinking of the national "scandals" currently in the news – and I use quotation marks intentionally, knowing many of you believe they're merely *so-called* scandals, while others of you are *scandalized* by that suggestion. Fighting over whether scandals are actually scandalous is a great American pastime right up there with ... well, American Idol.

Speaking of which . . . someone accused me of writing a "fluff piece" in our last issue, referring to my column about Idol and Candice. He was right, of course; it wasn't a "serious" piece about "serious" issues. But several readers told me it was their favorite column of mine, ever. One very smart woman whom I respect told me it made her cry. These comments got me thinking about "fluff," and how important it is to a happy, balanced life – and a happy, balanced society – and I decided to embrace the word, fluff it up a bit, and write another fluff piece. About fluff.

"Fluff," I think, is pretty much what it sounds like. It's the stuff that softens the rough edges of life. Smooths the hard surfaces. Fluff wraps us in warmth, snuggles us, breaks our falls, and gives us comfort. But fluff is also the "extra" stuff... the gravy that adds flavor to the meat, the cherry atop the sundae, the spice in the soup. Not all fluff is art, but all art is fluff (as I'm choosing to define the word). Sports are fluff. Books are fluff. Pets are not just fluffy... they're fluff. Movies, music, theatre and dance? Fluff, fluff, fluff and fluff! While it's true that fluff is not the cake, but merely the icing... who really wants cake without icing? Some might even argue the icing's the best part. (And the fluffier the better, I might add.)

While musing on this word, I googled it, and was reminded that "fluff" is both a noun *and* a verb. I particularly like the first definition of the verb "to fluff" that popped up on my screen: "Make something appear fuller and softer, typically by shaking or brushing it." Just like a favorite pillow or a living room rug, we all need a good fluffing from time to time. Sometimes, a gentle stroking (or brushing) is just the thing . . . a healing, cleansing encounter with beauty. Other times, we need a good shaking . . . a shock to the system . . . a reboot. Like the pillow and the rug, we emerge from these figurative fluffings both "fuller and softer" of spirit, having regained some semblance of our original, ideal selves. That's no small thing.

I've been rereading *The Great Gatsby* for my book club, and I'm convinced that Fitzgerald's novel still deserves its spot on syllabi around the country. It really is that good. More than just a time capsule from a distinctive era in American history – though it certainly is that – it's an honest, *painfully* honest, expose of the human heart

stitched together with sentences so gorgeous you can't help reading them over and over again. Last weekend, I saw the new "Gatsby" movie, and though it doesn't reach the heights of Fitzgerald's book, it's a dazzling film that captures the spirit of the story and entertains like crazy for two-plus hours.

The Great Gatsby, both book and film, is fluff of the highest order, and my soul feels fuller and softer already for having engaged with it. But fluff doesn't have to be highbrow or "classic." I've also been recently fluffed by "Iron Man 3," and "Star Trek: Into Darkness." I had my funny bone fluffed by "Spamalot" at the Arts Center, and my heartstrings fluffed by "The Little Mermaid, Jr." performed by the Beaufort Children's Theatre. And, of course, my favorite fluff in recent history was Candice Glover's

Idol

finale performance of "I Who Have Nothing." I still get chills just thinking about it.

Here's the reality: We live in a world of 24/7 media communication, and it comes at us fast and furious. We know the news – the bad news, anyway – almost before it happens. We receive way too much information, way faster than we can process it. We hear hundreds of opinions, but have no idea where to turn for truth. We're bombarded with scandals – both so-called and actual – on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis. We know far more than we should about the personal lives of our politicians, and far too little about what they do at the office. What we don't know – or merely *think* we know – we speculate about in online discussions that all too often reflect humanity at its worst. This assault goes on, day in and day out, and unless we completely unplug, none of us is immune. I threaten to unplug regularly – no Internet, no TV, no radio – but who am I kidding? I'm a media hound. Not only is it part of my job, it's a big part of my life. The ugly truth is that deep down in my twisted, conflicted heart, I love being plugged in. Lots of us do.

So what's my recommendation to people like us? Consume more fluff. It takes the edge off. Lightens the heart. Soothes the soul. Read a good novel. Listen to some music. See a movie. Not only will it provide a few hours of escape... it will send you back into the fray fortified and refreshed, with a better understanding of the human heart and a slightly enlarged vocabulary. (Hey, every little bit helps when you're out there in cyberspace, fighting the good fight for freedom and justice!)

I am happy to acknowledge *Lowcountry Weekly's* long, proud history as a purveyor of fluff, and in this issue, as always, you'll read about many local opportunities for fluffing up your life. Garden tours, barbecue festivals, new recipes to try, wines to taste... the list goes on and on. Somebody once sang that "fluff makes the world go 'round" – or something like that? – and here in the Lowcountry, you can practically feel it spinning on its axis.

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