

California Breeze

Spring Cleaning the Mind

The month of April used to be one of my favorites, not only because I had a birthday to look forward to, but also because there was usually an Easter to celebrate, with chocolate bunnies and endless amounts of jelly beans hiding in the green "grass" of our Easter baskets. April signaled the start of spring, which meant the sounds of baseball were heard again, as the final patches of snow melted into oblivion. The crisp, sunny days welcomed the new buds of flowers and trees, awaking from their winter slumber, and bikes came out of the garage to be cleaned, oiled and ridden with wild abandon. Another ritual was resurrected in houses all over the area, one that kids hated while mothers knew had to happen—spring cleaning. So, I thought I'd do some mental spring cleaning, and clear out whatever thoughts camping out in my brain.

I am seriously thinking about moving, getting out of the San Fernando Valley, and going over the hill to Los Angeles. The whole time I have lived here, I have been a Valley boy. Fer surrrre!! But, the culture of this Valley is very different from metropolitan L.A. The Valley is a collection of culturally mixed bedroom communities, strip malls, and limited night life of any worth. I am always over the hill (careful of the jokes here!), either going to dinner, visiting friends, seeing plays, hitting the clubs, and more. It's exciting, diverse, and more cosmopolitan than the Valley. If you are an adult and single, what would you be doing in the Valley? So, I will look for new digs after my lease ends in May, and hopefully Mark and Greg, my current roommates, will follow.

My new job as Marketing Manager at Costco is challenging me to prioritize the various demands and responsibilities. Promoting membership renewals, overseeing our part of the corporate fundraising efforts (for Children's Hospital), Chamber of Commerce involvement, responding to donation requests from different groups are some of my duties. I am still getting adjusted to it all.

The great thing about this new job is my schedule: 9-6. No more working late nights, I can now spend more time with friends after work, go out and find things to do. I will not fall into the rut of coming home from work, fixing dinner, and plopping down in front of the boob tube until bedtime. One thing about L.A. that I like is that there are ample little areas one can go and hang out—sip fresh java while engaged in inane conversation, or simply while people watching, browse through bookstores and record shops, or walking down busy sidewalks with other nightowls, for whom life is meant to be lived fully. The fact that I still don't have



kids to raise allows me this freedom!

Speaking of record shops, has anyone heard of the group "B-Tribe"? I have a new CD called, "Suave Suave", and it's a different type of sound that is very enticing, very soothing. I recommend it if you enjoy blends of jazz and other cultural rhythms.

A very funny movie to go see: "The Birdcage", with Robin Williams and Nathan Lane. I laughed all the way through it, and was not offended in the

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THE DRIVER NEEDED HELP

Years ago, the city bus I was riding crawled to a halt one early April evening. The driver grumbled as he fiddled with the gears. At last he swung around.

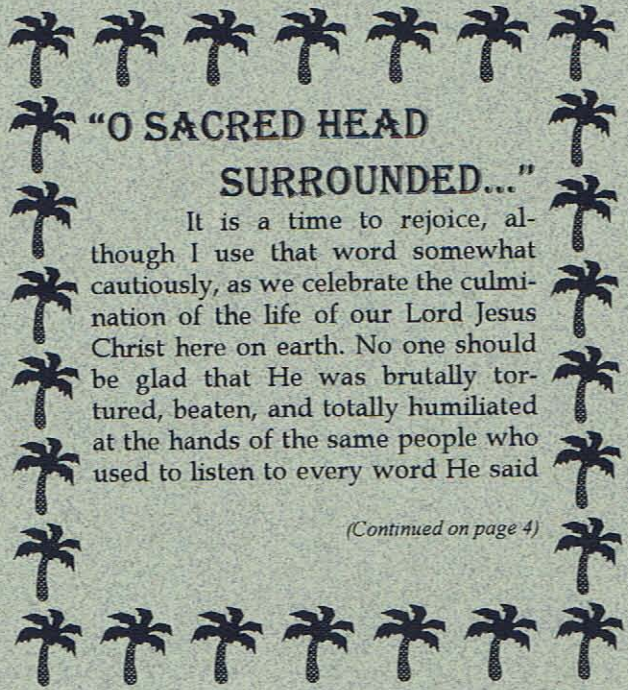
"This crate's not what she used to be," he announced to the passengers. "I want you all to lean forward when I count to three, and maybe we'll get her going and get home tonight. Ready?"

He turned back to the wheel. "One—two—three!"

In unison, the passengers leaned forward at the appointed moment, and the bus took off smoothly. The relieved passengers cheered.

And then the driver sang out, "April Fool!"

Thomas



"O SACRED HEAD

SURROUNDED..."

It is a time to rejoice, although I use that word somewhat cautiously, as we celebrate the culmination of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ here on earth. No one should be glad that He was brutally tortured, beaten, and totally humiliated at the hands of the same people who used to listen to every word He said

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Dead Men Don't Sing

Chapter Two



As he tugged at the heavy wooden door that led him into the vestibule of St. Joseph's, O'Donnell shuddered and for the thousandth time bemoaned the winds that defined Chicago this and every winter.

"Damn that Father Luke!", he cursed to the empty church entrance, "if I wasn't trying to score a few extra points with the Man upstairs I'd be ordering my third Margarita by now in Marty's." Marty's was the scruffy gin joint not far from O'Donnell's apartment, a place so thoroughly familiar to him he had his own barstool reserved for his inevitable daily appearances when in Florida.

The slam of the oval door startled him slightly, a booming cacophony resonating through the vacant and somewhat dingy church foyer. It was only his friend's uncanny ability to sense accurately that which mere mortals could not about human nature that swayed O'Donnell's resolve to be anywhere other than Chicago right about now. If he weren't such an outstanding assistant pastor, a one-man parish patching crew that kept this moribund congregation intact as the whites and retirees fled to

safer, or warmer climes, the archdiocese would have shuttered the place long ago. But it was not merely Fr. Luke's tireless ministrations that kept the swindling parishioners coming back. Much credit deservedly belonged to Ian Campbell and his choir, and it was the *his* that made Fr. Luke suspicious of Campbell's death, and what brought O'Donnell to the church in search of clues.

He made his way up to the choir loft, a diminutive and dank space, dimly lit—quite a disagreeable venue, he thought for the nerve center of the parish. O'Donnell pulled out his small flashlight and trained the thin beam onto the area where the conductor obviously would hold forth his sessions. A rusty music stand faced three rows of wooden chairs with similarly conditioned stands haphazardly strewn about. Sheets of music were everywhere and O'Donnell stooped to pick one up. His knowledge of music was sparse and reading the odd markings that were the language of music was like reading Mandarin for him. Despite this ignorance O'Donnell knew at once that this choir did not forge its burgeoning reputation singing, "Michael Row the Boat Ashore", or such ilk. This was a sophisticated score he was looking at, which undoubtedly would require much sweat equity to master.

Impressed as he was by the music sheet, he was startled at what caught his attention out of the corner of his eye. Off to the side, in stark contrast to the gloomy surroundings, stood a gleaming black lacquered upright piano. Indeed, it stood out like a nun at a Tailhook convention, and as he gravitated toward it, O'Donnell began to think about Paul Schaefer, if now the owner, then the artist who played it.

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From what Fr. Luke had told him, Schaefer was someone he should take a close look at, since it was he who chafed the most under Campbell's guidance. Fr. Luke felt that Schaefer was jealous of the success the choir was having, that the cheers that regularly greeted them after each Mass were due as much to his playing as anything Ian Campbell had contributed. Yet, Campbell got all the glory, with only mild kudos thrown Schaefer's way, despite the complex rhythms and gymnastic chord structures developed by Schaefer. He was as anonymous as one of the music stands, and a slow rage had simmered within him for this lack of respect. O'Donnell sat at the bench and admired the craftsmanship of the Schimmel, wondering how such a poor parish was able to afford such a beautiful and obviously expensive piano. Then he noticed a small engraving mounted on a brass plate, just above the black keys in the left corner. "Made expressly for Paul Schaefer, November, 1995." The too was odd since a background check on Schaefer's finances revealed an unremarkable economic profile, leaving O'Donnell to believe that despite his musical talents, Schaefer never made more than \$12,000 in any year, had little savings, and no prospects for prosperity on the horizon. Even with O'Donnell's limited musical knowledge, he felt certain this was an expensive piano, far beyond the ability of Paul Schaefer to afford.

Just then, the massive church door creaked open and the sounds of two men engaged in a vehement argument burst in. "I tell you I looked everywhere in that house, and it ain't there! And I ain't going back. The place gives me the creeps knowin' that a dead man used to live there. Besides, who's to say it ain't in some safety deposit box, or vault or sumpin'?"

A second voice, gravely from too many years of too many cigarettes growled, "Keep your voice down, we'll talk about it later. Let's just go up and get what we came for."

O'Donnell, realizing the two were coming up to the loft, dove behind the piano and almost landed on what appeared to be several plastic bottles. What's this, he grunted and aimed the flashlight in their direction. A look of puzzlement crossed his face as he stared at the label on one of the empty bottles that read, "Shark Cartilage, 500 mg."

Thoughts From the Home Base

1996—a year during which six of our members are reaching a notable plateau in their lives. They are: Mother and Sr. Marilyn, 70 years; Robin, 10 years; and our trio, Melissa, Mike and Greg, 40 years. Because at least two in the latter group might not feel that this is such a great cause for celebration, I wish to offer a few words of solace and comfort. (Yes, I know that is redundant, but one can't give too much of it you know!)

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least by the stereotyping it portrayed. Another one of those "must see" movies.

Have to say I did vote in last week's primary here in California. I couldn't vote for a presidential candidate, since I am an independent. However, I did my civic duty and cast my vote for several propositions and some judges I never heard of. One proposition, No-Fault Insurance, failed again to interest California voters. I think we are a bit mistrusting out here...

A hard place to get into, but worth it if you can, is the Magic Castle, in Hollywood. I was able to get in the other night, thanks to a friend who got 8 passes. We had a decent dinner first, then caught a couple shows featuring some pretty amazing magicians. The Magic Castle is a private club, and it features "Irma" the ghost who plays the piano and takes requests. You have to lean over and ask Irma to play what you want, and immediately the song you requested will start playing. Pretty funny watching guys in suits (required here) talking to a ghost at a piano.

I sat for a formal portrait a few weeks ago, and picked out one to be enlarged, as a gift for Mom for her "line-up" wall at home. I picked one that was not a close-up, as the photographer had me smiling broadly every time, and the crow's feet made me look older than I wanted to immortalize. I like the one I selected, and it should be hanging sometime soon in South Lyon. It's been a while since I had a formal picture taken, and what else do you get your mother for her birthday? She has so few needs, right Mom? By the way, are you taking your shark cartilage pills??

I liken entering the forties to becoming a high school or college senior. At last you have reached a maturity level that is recognized by those younger as being wise and experienced adults; and by peers and those older as dependable, responsible and trustworthy partners in the formidable task of saving the world from all the troubles and problems that many of the younger generations have caused (as well as those which many of the older coots have selfishly perpetuated).

In all seriousness, I am extremely proud of our whole clan which is, in toto, working hard to help make this a better world. In truth, being forty is nothing to fear. Rather it is a signal to not mourn the loss of the past years by reveling in the great memories and forgetting the tears, but for looking ahead at the challenges of being productive and enjoying the good pleasures of life and feeling of accomplishment, however simple; of knowing you are honorably in step with God's plan for you and forging ahead seeking new experiences that when looking back at these years you will be happy and content to know you've done your best. Really, it's only half-time, the best is yet to come. Believe me, I've been there!

Love one another, Dad

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Bill, how about taking on the next chapter of "Dead Men Don't Sing"? Then perhaps Mom can write chapter four...



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daily in the towns He traveled through. But we do rejoice at the fact that He paid the ultimate price, the sacrifice very few of us could ever do: His physical life for the sake of our spiritual lives. The colors of this season are deep purples and blood reds, the sanctuary adorned with the normal images of our faith, and the music is somber and sad. One song sung specifically during the final week before Christ's crucifixion is one that draws out the emotion of this occasion very effectively. Its slowly sung words describe in such sorrowful detail the abuse that was painfully bestowed upon the head and body of our Lord, the scourging He took for the only purpose to gain us entrance into His Father's kingdom. "O Sacred Head Surrounded" is a beautiful and sorrowful verse that, simply put, fills me with compassion, makes me wish I could've been there to "save" Him from the

hands of His torturers. It tells of how much Jesus suffered *before* He was unmercifully nailed to the timber. In fact, this song sets the theme of the whole Holy Week, and is the precursor to what is to follow—the glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I sing along with the choir, I am there, witnessing the worst that humanity has ever done. The bloody destruction of our Savior was done slowly, with the intent of total pain and humiliation, and this scene fills me with strong emotion, more than anything else in our Catholic seasons. No one deserved to be treated like this, as this song somberly describes. Yet, we have to look past this point knowing that the end result is our saving grace. He endured the most terrific of all possible beatings, head to toe, all without verbal retaliations. He knew His role long before it was to take place, and He did it only for us! Now how many of us could, or would, do something even remotely similar for someone else?

Greg