

Hero hungry

Searching for ordinary people with dreams

My English teacher made a statement the other day that struck me with such force that my heart reacted like a strummed chord and my ears hummed with the sound of it.

He said, "We (as a people) are hungry for heroes."

What a profound statement and what a true insight into human nature. We are hungry for heroes. That's why Sylvester Stallone, Steven Seagal, and Arnold Schwarzenegger-whatsisface get top dollar for their gory glory flicks.

We love to watch these modern-day superheroes, unfairly scorned by the establishment. But when duty calls they put aside their personal pains for the common good.

Against all odds they spring back to save their women, their country, and basically humankind as we know it — all in the time frame of two hours.

We are hungry for heroes. I am and have always been hungry for heroes. As a child, my heroes were the children in the chronicles of Narnia.

They ventured into lands that barred entrance to all except the imaginations of children. And with sheer will and the help of Aslan — son of the Emperor over the sea — they conquered evil and restored peace to a war-torn and unhappy land.

Some will call me naive and say that I am out of touch with reality for even believing in the possibility of heroes, but I agree with a good friend of mine who said that "reality is just an excuse not to dream."

At this stage in my life, my heroes are not so far-fetched or other-worldly as they used to be. Like the transcendentalist writer Whitman, I glory in the ordinary. My heroes now are ordinary men and women who dare extraordinary feats.



Chaka Johnson

"I agree with a good friend of mine who said that 'reality is just an excuse not to dream.'"

For instance, I know a woman who put her own dreams on a back burner and held, for almost a decade, a job she hated. As a result she helped launch her husband's law career, raised a professional dancer, two future lawyers, one teacher, and one professional college student.

Only after all of that did my mom turn around and finish her own college degree. She's a hero in my eyes.

Another hero of mine is a man who looked at the social and political course of a nation and decided to alter it.

Imagine a river running along a channel through which it has coursed since its inception. Imagine the noise that it makes as it rushes over tree roots, boulders, and down thundering waterfalls.

Now imagine a man standing by the side of the river with rocks in his hands. He looks around, sighs, and then wades in — determined to change its course.

That man was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A man who dared to chance

the rapids of a nation and was ultimately crushed beneath their torrents. An ordinary man who dared extraordinary feats.

By far my greatest hero is yet another ordinary man. This man was more imaginative than the children-in C.S. Lewis' books, far more radical than King, and far more selfless than my mother.

He stood up for the poor and the oppressed, he touched the terminally ill, he upheld the equality of women, and — instead of being so short-sighted as to dream of changing a single nation — he dreamed of changing the world.

Jesus was a radical revolutionary. He dreamed of healing hurts, bridging the gaps in relationships, giving mankind a purpose and a responsibility to help each other — even at the expense of losing a bit of our selfishness.

His ambition was to introduce us to his Father so that we could also become members of the family.

Ultimately, he paid the price for his audacity and he died a tragic death on a cursed cross. But, in my mind, he was, is, and will always be the ultimate hero.

We hunger for heroes. And I hunger to be a hero. I want to feed the hungry, heal the sick, and clothe the poor.

No, I don't think that I'm God, but I do believe I have the talents that I have for a reason.

I can keep them to myself or I can pour them out so that other people might benefit from them as well. In my life, I will be a hero.

We hunger for heroes. As a people, as a nation, as a world we are desperate for heroes. And as individuals, we need to be heroes for each other.

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Cut off

Conservatives neuter art's nature, funding

Few people would compare neutering a cat to the government's attack on the National Endowment for the Arts.

However, regular patrons of this column know that nothing is beyond my abilities.

This past weekend, I took my 5-month-old kitty Flannery into the vet for neutering and declawing.

It was a hard, painful decision for the both of us. We spent a long time discussing the various pros and cons.

Flannery argued that, as a growing adolescent, he needed to pee on everything — including the comp books lying strewn about my apartment.

I noted that, while I often thought he showed remarkably good taste in the books he selected to pee on, there was a limit to what I could put up with.

Declawing was more difficult. Ripping his little claws out sounded like an evil thing to do. The vet argued that young declawed kitties bounce back quickly. Friends with declawed cats said that I would be happy with my choice in future years — when I presumably would no longer have Goodwill Furniture.

And so, with a heavy heart, I stuffed the little monster into his carrying cage, deafening my ears and my heart to his pitiful little yelps of protest.

I tried not to hear the little frantic rattling noise his tiny paws made on the harsh, cold metal bars as we drove down to the vet. When I took him out of his cage and handed him to the nurse, I waved goodbye and whispered, "Flannery, I will never do this to you again."

I'm sure he knew that those were hollow, meaningless words.

In short, I betrayed him.

From now on, sleep and food will be his only pleasures. Instead of leaping about, tearing down curtains



Debra Cumberland

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and dancing to the Grateful Dead, Flannery will just lie on the couch, fat and listless, his eyes lacking that certain spark that made me want to run out and buy him a little kitty leather jacket.

With a heavy heart, I turned back toward campus and slunk into Kimball Hall to hear John Frohnmayer, former head for the National Endowment for the Arts, speak about the state of the arts today.

I sat there in shock. It sounded like he was talking about my cat.

Where once the arts were vital, full of energy and spark, now they are becoming dull and listless.

The National Endowment for the Arts made a tremendous nationwide difference for all citizens, said Frohnmayer, especially in small communities that might not otherwise have been able to set up artist-

in-the-schools programs or have community arts organizations.

Unfortunately, the organization has come under increasing attack from the Right — which accuses the NEA of catering to alternative "fringe" groups that do not represent mainstream American values.

The neutering process has begun.

Last year's NEA budget, for instance, was a mere \$167 million. While this may sound like a lot to a starving student, it amounted to a mere 63 cents per person during Frohnmayer's tenure as NEA president. That amount will decrease to \$99 million in 1996.

In short, not only have the arts been neutered, but they are in the process of being declawed as well.

Because I am living in an apartment with a rigid landlord, I can only have an indoor cat. This requires neutering and the occasional declawing. I can't have a cat that leads a natural cat life.

Americans seem to feel the same way about the arts.

They don't seem to want to acknowledge that arts are, by their nature, political. They don't seem to want to acknowledge that arts exist to shake us up and transform us. They deny the power of art to make us see ourselves — and each other — in different ways.

They want arts that are neutered and declawed and will sit on the couch purring, with glazed little eyes that say, "Once, I was happy and funded. Once, I was appreciated."

Like me, the right-wing element has taken the arts to the vet to get fixed.

When will we wake up and let the arts run outside, climb trees, and scare the neighborhood squirrels?

When will we let them have some balls?

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From the

INTERNET

Werewolves found in Christian history

'Tis the season to be spooky — and the Net can be as spooky a place as any. Just turn the lights down low and hunker over the flickering glow of your CRT and I'll tell you a story:

The Greatest Werewolf Secret

Quite often the antagonist of the werewolf beliefs (and of werewolves themselves), is the Catholic church and its larger outgrowth of Christianity in general.

Through the church's inquisitions, tortures and writings, the church has taught western culture of the "inherent" evil of werewolves.

The werewolf was commonly believed to be the descendant of Cain or a monstrosity created by selling one's soul to the devil. Even today, the church in its many forms views werewolves as the incarnation of evil — but there is one whom they've forgotten.

The greatest werewolf secret of them all.

One must understand that, in the medieval mappamundi, lurking at the edges of the world were the monstrous races.

Authors like Pliny, with his book "Natural History," included illustrations and descriptions of these races culled from descriptions and classical writings.

These races were eclectic in appearance, and some are even familiar today, while others seem outrageous.

The Giants, the Pygmies, the Panotii (had giant ears), the Astomi (no mouths), the Anthropophagi (cannibals), the Amazons, etc etc etc. But, most importantly, the Cynocephali.

The Cynocephali, or Dog-heads, were one of the best known monstrous races. Each had the body of a man and the head of a dog.

According to Pliny, they lived in the mountains of India and barked to communicate. They lived in caves and wore animal skins. They hunted very successfully and used javelins, bows and swords.

Several sources make them cannibals. All sources emphasize that they combine the natures of man and beast.

The Cynocephali retained an interesting position in Christian writings and teachings. Jesus' words in John (10:16) implied that there were many non-Christian flocks around the world that need to be shepherded.

This idea was reinforced by the story of the Pentecost.

As it was told in the book of Acts, tongues like flames descended upon the apostles and they were given the gift to talk in strange languages.

"Men of every nation under heaven" who lived in Jerusalem were amazed to hear the apostles speak their native languages.

Depictions of the nations present at the Pentecost was a popular theme in early Christian art. The idea of "every nation under heaven" was taken seriously. Consequently, the Cynocephali appear frequently,

such as in the "Theodore" Psalter that is in the British Library. It depicts Christ preaching to dog-headed men, a far from uncommon illustration.

From the depiction of dog-heads being preached to at the Pentecost follow the logical

stories of dog-heads being converted to Christianity.

One such, the "Contendings of the Apostles" has an extremely interesting section.

The book describes the Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew among the Parthians. The two apostles meet a giant cannibal named Abominable. As the name would suggest, he was a terrifying sight: "...four cubits in height, and his face was like unto the face of a great dog, and his eyes were like unto lamps of fire which burnt brightly, and his teeth were like unto the tusks of a wild boar, or the teeth of a lion, and the nails of his hands were like unto curved reaping hooks, and the nails of his toes were like unto the claws of a lion, and the hair of his head came down over his arms like unto the mane of a lion, and his whole appearance was awful and terrifying."

Luckily for the apostles, they chanced upon Abominable after he'd been visited with a vision, in which he was promised a human form if he accepted the apostles' teachings.

The greatest werewolf secret of all is not that the Christian church, knew of, converted, and even used werewolves.

The secret is in the single name of Christopher. Saint Christopher is the patron saint of travelers and seafarers. He is fairly well known in western tradition.

But the greatest secret of all is that Saint Christopher was a Cynocephali, a dog-head, a werewolf. The fact that Saint Christopher is a Cynocephali was silently removed from most of western literature. Some of the best literature of the Saint's life is located in Ireland and Celtic culture of Britain.

The popular story of Christopher is very much like Abominable's. Christopher was born a pagan Dog-head called Reprobos. He regrets his bestial nature and is overjoyed when his conversion to Christianity allows him to lose his Cynocephalic nature.

An eighth-century list of Saints explained that Christopher "was one of the Dog-heads... He meditated much on God, but at that time could only speak the language of the Dog-heads."

As time passed, the writings mentioned less and less of Christopher's Cynocephalic nature. Walter of Speyer wrote, in the tenth century, that Christopher "took his origins from the Cynocephali, a people in speech and countenance dissimilar to others."

Saint Christopher was eventually ousted from the ranks of the saintly. But belief in the Cynocephali remained in circulation for several hundred more years.

It eventually mutated, through retellings and trials, to the great werewolf scares in the 1600s. So there you have it. One of the best kept secrets of the werewolf world.

Not only were werewolves employed and welcomed to the Christian world, there is actually a werewolf saint. A great secret indeed.

This essay can be discovered at <<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~pollarpe/werewolf/christopher.html>>