

Tis the season to be Mary

Ok... it is not Christmas time. However, as we are under a dreaded Winter Storm Warning I felt like talking about one of my favorite Yuletide movies. As I was playing Scene It with my niece earlier this evening, this question was raised: "In the National Lampoon Vacation movies, what was the nickname of Clark Griswold's son?" Of course anyone who has seen the misadventures of the Chicago suburban family knows the answer: Rusty.

Christmas Vacation is my favorite of the four films (yes, there were four... let us not forget the travesty that was *Vegas Vacation*). It shows the hapless Griswold clan as they do their best to entertain their whole extended family (both sides mind you). Everything from chopping down the family Christmas tree to the reading of "A Visit from St. Nick" on Christmas Eve. My favorite scene from this classic has to be Clark hanging from the eavestrough attempting to staple lights onto the roof. I can imagine my father doing the same thing... even attaching his coat sleeve to the roof and sliding down with the collapsing ladder.

One nitpicky bit though. Speaking of Rusty (as well as Audrey, the daughter), they seemed to age differently in each movie. The young man seemed to decrease in age between *European Vacation* and *Christmas Vacation*. Rusty was played by Jason Lively (?) in Europe and by Johnny Galecki (before he was cast as Darlene's boyfriend on "Roseanne") at Christmas. I often wondered why the change in age. It's not as if Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, and Randy Quaid could decrease in age. Just a minor quibble to an otherwise hilarious holiday tradition.

Oscar Party

We had an Oscar party last night. It was a lot of fun! We asked the guests to bring a \$5 item from home they would have put in a garage sale. Everyone filled out a ballot, and whoever got the most correct guesses (my husband out of sheer luck, can you believe it? He doesn't know anything about the Oscars! Congratulations Honey!) chose an item first, followed by the person with the next most correct guesses, and so on. So, we got a cool looking food chopper. Haven't tried it yet... I didn't do too badly on the guessing, I got to choose fourth... but I was disappointed because the item I really wanted (needed, actually) had been taken by then... but I am happy with the food chopper, I'll have to see how it works. What I really wanted were the set of metal padlocks, it sounds weird, I know... but we have this escaping parrot who needs all the doors on his cage padlocked – there are 3 – and he can bite thru plastic padlocks. The other day he got out of his cage and chewed the light switch plate off the wall... so I'm afraid we're going to come home one day to find a parrot. But, who would have guessed that the padlocks would be in such high demand. Not my husband, who did get to choose first but thought the padlocks would be left for me to choose, so instead he chose the food chopper for me – awww. But I really recommend doing award show parties, sports-watching parties, etc. this way, it's lots of fun, and it's really interesting to see what kind of stuff you end up with.

But enough about us and our party, let's move on to the real party... I didn't really see any of the red carpet this year – oh darn – cuz we were busy playing a game and then we watched Barbara Walters interviews, which I don't usually watch. I did see Hillary Swank, who I mistook for Halle Berry – don't know what that was about, but she looked really different, barely recognizable. I thought the show was supposed to start at 8, but it started closer to 9, which could explain why our

poor friends were stuck here until midnight on a work night! I thought Jon Stewart did pretty well as host. He was pretty funny, but my favorite Oscars host is Ellen – I really wish they'd have her back. I got 8 of the 24 votable categories correct. Not an outstanding score, but among our party of about 10, I think it was about average. The only award contenders I saw this year were Gone Baby Gone and Juno. See one of my previous posts for a review of Gone Baby Gone and you'll see why I wasn't broken up about it losing out on its Oscar chance. I was glad to see Juno win for one of the screenplay awards – it was a really well written movie, and I recommend it to anyone who is not a teen. If you have a teen, watch out, and do not let them see this movie, as it totally glorifies teen pregnancy, makes it seem easy, and will most likely have them saying, what's the big deal, I can handle it, no problem. Enough of my rambling, here are the Oscar winners in case you can't find them anywhere else for some weird reason:

Best Motion Picture: "No Country for Old Men."

Lead Actor: Daniel Day-Lewis, "There Will Be Blood."

Lead Actress: Marion Cotillard, "La Vie en Rose."

Supporting Actor: Javier Bardem, "No Country for Old Men."

Supporting Actress: Tilda Swinton, "Michael Clayton."

Director: Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, "No Country for Old Men."

Foreign Language Film: "The Counterfeiters," Austria.

Adapted Screenplay: Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, "No Country for Old Men."

Original Screenplay: Diablo Cody, "Juno."

Animated Feature Film: "Ratatouille."

Art Direction: "Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street."

Cinematography: "There Will Be Blood."

Sound Mixing: "The Bourne Ultimatum."

Sound Editing: "The Bourne Ultimatum."

Original Score: "Atonement," Dario Marianelli.

Original Song: "Falling Slowly" from "Once," Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova.

Costume: "Elizabeth: The Golden Age."

Documentary Feature: "Taxi to the Dark Side."

Documentary Short Subject: "Freeheld."

Film Editing: "The Bourne Ultimatum."

Makeup: "La Vie en Rose."

Animated Short Film: "Peter & the Wolf."

Live Action Short Film: "Le Mozart des Pickpockets ('The Mozart of Pickpockets')."

Visual Effects: "The Golden Compass."

Sunday Bloody Sunday

Well... another Oscar night has come and gone. I was actually please with my ballot results this year: 10/24!!!! I usually do much worse. Perhaps it was the thrill of actually having something to win that created the competitive urge in me. Most

of the movies nominated this year in the BIG categories were not ones you would expect to see in Northwest OHHO so you do the best with what you have.

I started off on a roll. I think I successfully picked 4 or five in a row. THEN, we got to the technical awards. Most of these were won by *The Bourne Ultimatum*. I have seen the first two films in the Matt Damon starring spy trilogy but have yet to see the third and that won for Best Sound Mixing and Sound Editing. How terrible would it have been if it had won one and not both awards.

Another downfall was in Best Song. I should have known that when a movie (even a Disney movie) is nominated more than once in the same category, it is the kiss of death. I know very little about the movie *Once* from which the song "Falling Slowly" comes.

The contest came down to the final award: Best Picture. Three of us were tied. I picked *There Will Be Blood*. **WRONG!!!!** AH, well... I was really pleased with my results. I won two packages of gift bags which is a quite useful prize and did not end up with the Spider-Man cap that I provided as a prize.

The Price is WRONG, Bit... TAKE TWO, ENTER WALMART

I thought this would be a perfect title to use for my venting session about many people's favorite place to shop, Walmart. But since I just used the title the other day, this will have to be take two on the title.

I have a love-hate relationship with Walmart. It's a lot more

hate than love at this point, but I try to be an optimist, view the cup as half full, that kind of thing. I used to love the place. That was when I had lots of other shopping choices. Also I wasn't stuck there at least once a week for hours on end with crabby kids because I had fewer kids then, and for some reason, they used to like shopping there. But now that Walmart has put many of the other stores in my area out of business, and there aren't very many other choices for local shoppers to make, Walmart is beginning to engage in a little bit of price gouging. Let me back up for a minute... what I loved most about Walmart when I first started shopping there were their low, low prices. This is no longer the case! I go to Walmart about twice a week. I try to go just once, but that plan never works in my favor – we either run out of something, I forget something, or something comes up, like an impromptu get-together or Pampered Chef party. But anyway, so I'm there twice a week, at least. And EVERY time I go, they raise the price on at least one of my "staple" items! Even if it's only 7 cents or so, it's still a big deal to me, because over years, it really adds up! And, in the case of the toilet paper I buy, it used to cost \$1. The price went up to \$1.24 **in one visit!** I'm no math wiz, but I think that is almost a 25% price increase **in one visit!** Also, it's difficult to compare prices at different stores if the prices are constantly changing. But don't be fooled – Walmart knows this. And that's not the only trick they have up their sleeve either. If your Walmart is anything like mine, they are out of stock on things constantly! I think it's a purposeful action so that they can force you into buying a similiar item that costs more just to avoid running out of the item yourself or having to take the time to go to another store – if there are any other stores left, that is. For example, let's say Walmart is out of the Great Value (Walmart's generic brand = same as Heinz but cheaper) brand of ketchup. Are you going to tell your barbecue guests you don't have enough ketchup? Or are you going to make another stop at different store, unloading all your kids from the car just

to run in for ketchup? Or, are you going to choose likely option #3, the one Walmart wants you to choose: you mumbling and swearing under your breath as you pay more for the Heinz ketchup, of which Walmart has so thoughtfully stocked plenty? If I had the time or any fewer kids, I would probably go with option #2 just on a matter of principle, but I just don't have the time nor the energy to take a freaky stand against Walmart and their price gouging ways. In updating this blog I will keep you posted on what has changed by how much – it will be good to help me vent so my family and friends don't have to hear all these gory details constantly. And, because I've rambled forever about Walmart, I will also save my gripes about their oil changes for another post. For now, I think I'm done wasting time droning on and on about Walmart... besides, it's almost Oscar time!

BEEE True To You

This above all: To thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Hamlet, Act I scene iii

How rich these words sound nearly 400 years after William

Shakespeare put them to paper. Polonius is advising his son Laertes to be true to himself and he will be true to those around him. Know himself for the person he is before others can know the true him. Many works of art have included this theme within them. One example is a seemingly simple movie: Disney's *Aladdin*.

Aladdin is a street wise beggar who lives by his wits in the village of Agrabah. However, he longs to be much more. One day in the marketplace, Aladdin comes face to face with a beautiful young lady who appears to be a common peasant girl until she reveals herself as the fair Princess Jasmine. When he finds a magic lamp, a comical genie appears and grants him three wishes. Almost immediately, the young peasant wishes to be something he is not: a prince. As Prince Aliababwa (or Ali Abooboo), the streetrat fumbles around making himself look totally foolish as he tries to win the heart of Princess Jasmine.

One night, Ali takes Jasmine on a magic carpet ride to show her a "Whole New World." However, even before the couple go on their flight, Jasmine begins to see beneath the "prince's" disguise. Following the date, Jasmine tricks Aladdin into admitting his ruse. BUT, riddle me this, why was it ok for Jasmine to pretend to be something she was not in the marketplace? Can we say....EEEEVIL WOMAN.

There must be thousands of books, movies, songs, plays, or any type of art which attempts to convey the message of honesty to one's self. Isn't it ironic how such a fun Disney cartoon displays this message to children of all ages? Take the time to look back at the best of Disney's animated movies and see how many of life's lessons you can discover.

Church

Yes, tonight I went to church service. It was actually a sort of unusual service in that all of the children's ministry was asked to attend the main service. Ordinarily the 4th and 5th grades would be in service anyway as the last weekend of the month they go to service with their parents (in preparation for junior high when they always attend regular service), but this time it was kindergarten all the way on up in a family service. It made sense though- the series my pastor is currently in is about family. What this meant though was there was no drama and no kid's ministry for me to be involved with this weekend. In fact, there is no drama for the next month. Though drama is fun, I appreciate the break.

Tonight they also did an "impromptu choir," meaning they called on people to come up front and sing the worship songs in the choir risers, children included. Well, because the children were part of the service, they chose a few children's worship songs in addition to some regular songs. During the kid's songs, they had one boy who came up, a 4th grader, stand in front of us (yes, I came up to sing!) and show the motions that the kids do when singing the songs. It was so cool- this boy has no trouble in front of large crowds- he actually has been doing drama with me for the last couple years. Incidentally, his dad was one of the worship leaders which probably gave his confidence a boost as well. His dad must have been quite proud of him (the *good* type of pride for another, not the selfish pride the Bible speaks against).

Unfortunately he ran off the stage before I could give him a high five for doing it (and doing a great job at it too!) so I guess I will have to catch him next week in class.

Special Ed

One of the most common roles I fill in for is special education. Sometimes it's quite challenging, sometimes quite easy. Well, it is only truly easy when there are teaching assistants who pretty much take over while I take the role of assistant. This is commonly the case in mentally impaired classrooms (autism, Down syndrome, etc.). Yesterday was mostly on the easy side. I was subbing for a junior high teacher who actually only had one class of her own- the rest were "team teaching," which generally means the sub plays the part of assistant while the other teacher teaches. But what does one do when both teachers are out and both left plans saying the other teacher will take over? That appeared to be the case when I walked into second period and compared notes with the other sub. Fortunately, this turned out to be a non-crisis as the teacher he was subbing for left plans on the board in addition to saying that my teacher would take over. I can only guess his teacher found out about my teacher's absence only after writing the plans. Whew. The rest of the day was quite uneventful, just following the same group of students around through social studies, math, science and language arts. I also had to help look over a group of homework lunchers (detention really). It's just as it sounds- students who didn't turn in homework in one or more classes worked on it during lunch. I was told when they first started this program there were over 60 kids in the room at one time! Now that has to be against fire codes. I was quite happy there were only about 15. In any event this was definitely a

position I would do again.

Finding Inspiration

Everyone has a passion in life. For some it is a hobby. Others maybe family. But whatever it is, most have to learn to balance their passion with what may seem like the mundane world of everyday life. In the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, one man struggles to do just that and along the way finds that his passion in life may have changed.

Richard Dreyfuss portrays Glenn Holland, a would-be composer who accepts a "day job" teaching music appreciation to high school students. During the course of his 40 year career, he finds that he has the power to instill passion in others. A clarinetist lacking confidence and an academically challenged athlete who HAS to take his course to fulfill his graduation requirements are just two of the students he encounters. My favorite student is the young promising singer who he encourages to follow her dream. Glenn not only inspires musically but in all aspects of life.

However, Mr. Holland's personal life is often filled with turmoil. He spends a lifetime searching for the inspiration to compose his one great piece of music. He struggles to find a balance between work and family. His musical passion and his family life are put to the ultimate test when his young son, Cole loses his hearing. A brilliant scene shows Mr. Holland attempting to bridge the rift with his son by performing a personal rendition of John Lennon's "Beautiful Boy."

Some intriguing historical flashbacks are used to show the passage of time. This creates the illusion that the audience is watching a movie based upon the events of a real person.

The Vietnam War is seen through flashbacks and creates drama in Mr. Holland's life.

Mr. Holland's Opus is a remarkable movie for anyone who has inspired or been inspired. It is sentimental without being sappy.


Holy Bologna, Batman

Sometimes a movie franchise which begins on a promising note can take a big leap downhill. One case would be the Batman films began by Tim Burton in 1989. The original *Batman* was dark, very atmospheric, close to the comics began in 1939. By the time *Batman and Robin* was made, the movies were an all out farce. In 2005, enough time had gone by to attempt a rebirth of sorts with *Batman Begins*.

Batman and Robin ended the franchise for several reasons. George Clooney did not a Batman make. He even considered the performance terrible. Perhaps he wanted to be part of a sure-fire money making movie series but upon reading the script found himself in trouble.

The villains were lame. Mr. Freeze was a carry over from the 60s television show and was a laughable character at best. Arnold Schwarzenegger seems well cast in movies in which he can deliver memorable catch phrases (Hasta la vista, baby; I'll be back; Chill out). That seems to what he does best in any movie he is in to say nothing of his ability to govern the richest, most populous state in the country.

Another great big flaw was in costume design. In some awful anatomical promotion, a cod piece was added to the Bat-costume. To add even more insult, nipples were added to the

chest area. These may not have been so noticable had it not been necessary to blatantly display both in close up shots  . This must have been an attempt to promote the new and improved Bat-suit. And who to blame for this... the director himself, Joel Schumaker (who should take all the blame for this mess).

After the success of *Batman Begins*, one can hope that the superhero will once again return to the movies in a good way.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

I was having a brain freeze today and could not come up with a suitable movie to review... until I read a blog form a friend.

Happy Gilmore is one of the funniest movies involving one of the most boring sports imaginable: GOLF... UGH!!!!. Adam Sandler is one of the funniest guys around. I abhor watching golf... it is so quiet that that you are just dying to yell out "FIRE" or some other attention grabber. But this movie makes it hilarious. My favorite part of the whole movie has got to be when Happy is in a celebrity pro/am tournament. He was lucky enough to be paired with America's favorite game show host: Bob Barker former star of The Price is Right. Happy's day on the course does not go well. Bob makes the comment that Happy's hockey playing could not be worse than his golf game. Then, the hilarity begins. Bob Barker gets into a knock-down, drag-out fight. When it seems that Happy is victorious, he exclaims: "The price is WRONG, B*%#H." To which Bob goes into a fit of rage and gives his golf partner a good beating. After finishing Happy off, Bob returns the favor by saying: "now, you've had enough... b*\$@h." All those days Bob spent boxing in the service must have payed off because the fight actually resembled a choreographed boxing match. It was one of the highlights of the movie to watch the

normally composed game show host lose his cool. Speaking of boxing matches, Happy's golf mentor, Chubbs, was played by Carl Weathers who played Apollo Creed in the Rocky movies.