

WRITING SAMPLES



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RAGING AT MIDNIGHT

Hollywood Octogenarian, Kirk Douglas, Takes Another Stab at the Big Screen

By Johnny Blue Star

Kirk Douglas, speech-impaired, living at the whim of a pace-maker, survivor of a death-dealing helicopter accident, understandably weakened by the weight of his eighty six years- continues to stare Death and Infirmity square in the face, pushing the edge of his creativity and humanity defiantly forward. And, now in his later years, he keeps writing and speaking and acting, summoning us all to do what he has always done- to be himself at all costs.

And so now, the old Hollywood warrior comes to the screen once again, starring with his son and other family in “It Runs in the Family,” looks familial dysfunctionality in the face in, of course, a comic dimension. Regardless of his mode of portrayal, Kirk Douglas continues to thumb his nose at the ticking clock, leaving the younger generation of movie goers to have another glimpse at the movie star who never gave up. This stubborn refusal to heed the call of convention or the common current of the tides has characterized the older Douglas throughout his life and career.

When the Welch poet, Dylan Thomas, saw his father, then in his eighties, slowly losing his vision and power, he wrote his renowned poem, enjoining his formerly potent and vibrant parent, ‘Do not go gentle in that good night.’ Surely, no one knowing this powerful poem, cannot envision Kirk and Michael Douglas on the screen in their new film, “It Runs In the Family,” without thinking of Thomas’ injunction. As former poetry professor Linda Sue Grimes has commented, “Dylan Thomas’ father had been a robust, militant man most of his life, and when in his eighties, he became blind and weak, his son was disturbed seeing his father become “soft” or “gentle.” .

If anybody has ever embodied the robustness and virility of youth, it is surely Kirk Douglas, whose “Champion” and “Spartacus” were startling tributes to this raw power. Following his stroke and helicopter accident, Kirk Douglas, now in his eighties himself, has brought an unexpected gentleness and vulnerability into his older years, but not without the edge of a crusader and errant warrior against the infirmities and trials of old age. It is indicative of this spirit that Kirk Douglas, who survived a serious 1996 stroke with a speech impairment, kept on going, using his misfortune to inspire those of similar experience- not to give up or stop the good fight- as the character he played in the film, “Diamonds,” which he made before “It Runs in the Family.” Several years ago, he spoke at the Nortel Palm Springs International Film Festival, haltingly, with difficulty, to be sure, but with great spirit and the legendary fierceness that now would take on the less spectacular twin villains of old age and death.

In his autobiography, "The Rag-Picker's Son," Douglas speaks lyrically of his fight with poverty, anti-Semitism and gross anonymity to create a screen persona of legendary significance. He is blunt about his sex life, his pacemaker and unquenchable spirit as he fought to the top of the Hollywood barrel. The picture he draws of his early years and the Indiscretions of his youth- and his middle age- do not necessarily paint a flattering picture. Nor does he pull any punches with his accidents or illnesses nor even shy away from his pacemaker. He draws you to him by his unrelenting truthfulness.

In his life, filled with acting successes, there was also a very successful business side, not often reaching the public's consciousness. Douglas, in his life, created one of the first independent film companies, Bryna, named after his mother- and managed by his wife. This company, among other great pictures, produced "Spartacus," "Lonely Are the Brave and Seven Days in May." Still another legendary effort of Kirk Douglas when he succeeded in un-blacklisting Dalton Trumbo, writer of Spartacus.

In the Desert, as everywhere else, his charitable activities are well-known. He and his wife have been particularly active with the Desert Museum. The Douglas Foundation has contributed to many charities. Of many, we will mention here the Los Angeles Mission for the Homeless, which now has opened the Anne Douglas Center for Women and the Motion Picture Relief Home's Alzheimer's Unit, named after his father. One spectacular donating is the \$2 million the Foundation has promised to build a theater opposite the renowned Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. From the very small to the large and dramatic, the Foundation is an outgrowth of the actor's ever-expanding heart.

"It Runs in the Family," produced by Michael Douglas, presents three generations of Douglasses, mirroring three generations of Grombergs, a New York family, they play in the film. Although featuring Kirk's ex-wife and Michael's mother, Diana and Michael's son, Cameron, eyes will still undoubtedly remained focused on Michael and Kirk, both stars if significant and power. This pairing took a long time coming, perhaps significantly affected by Kirk's recurring health problems.

Does Michael, no longer so young himself, stand there sometimes in amazement and mutter to himself a powerful piece of that last stanza- thinking of his father, whose courage the darkness could never dim?-

*And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

**NATASHA DEWALD, AU.D.
PROFILE OF AUDIOLOGIST**

Raised in Saskatchewan, Canada, Natasha Dewald, the audiologist who now runs the Help U Hear (HUH?!?) clinic in Palms Springs, holds a Bachelor degree in Speech Pathology, a Master's degree in Hearing Science and a Doctorate in Audiology. For the past six years, she has been living in San Diego, running a successful hospital based clinic.

But then, last year, she met Dennis Mario, the founder of HUH?!?, who shared her vision of a quality hearing healthcare that allows a partnership between the Audiologist and the patient. After surveying the Valley, she realized the need for a quality hearing clinic run by a Doctor of Audiology, such as herself. "With my Doctorate degree, I am able to diagnose and manage hearing loss, which hearing aid dispensers are not qualified to do. So I decided to relocate to the Valley, purchased a house and help Dennis open H.U.H! We are the first clinic in the Valley to utilize the Otowizzard, a computer that allows both the Audiologist and the patient to visually 'see what they cannot hear'. This is very important, because without the education of knowing why you hear certain sounds better than others, the fitting of a hearing aid is incomplete. And it is this education that makes the difference between a successful hearing aid wearer and it ending up in the drawer!"

**TO KNOW HIM IS TO LOVE HIM
WHY THEN MUST HE BE PROTECTED?
-a review of a new website, ProtectGod.Com-
By Johnny Blue Star**

Paul Winchell, the famed ventriloquist companion of Jerry Mahoney; voice of Disney's "Tigger," performer in innumerable films and top television shows, pioneer of the artificial heart- now has another mission. He is the author of a book called, "The Defamation of God," which he has abridged in a website, titled www.protectgod.com. Paul Winchell is on a mission to protect God from the one book that has long been conceived to be His own accurate, personal statement, the Bible.

Whereas Winchell is quick to point out that he does not actually know God himself, he does know what he stands for. "God is kind, wise, patient, loving, just, merciful, and compassionate. To me, that description exemplifies the true meaning of God." And Paul Winchell is alarmed to see that, on the whole, the Bible, both New and Old Testaments, do not portray God in that light. In fact, according to Winchell's extensive survey of the Testaments, God is more the author of carnage, atrocities and injustice than the author of compassion and mercy. To Winchell, these descriptions of God in the Bible must be untrue. Worse, their very presence, defames God as he must actually be.

This website is an exhaustive treatise on ethical anomalies in the Bible, revolving around God's behavior. From the strange story of Abraham and Isaac, where Abraham's loyalty is tested by being asked to murder his beloved son- to God's protection of the incestuous

Lot from the ravages of Sodom and Gomorrah to his punishment of Moses, for what seems to be a minor transgression, from entering into the Promised Land to his issuance. Winchell believes God's image is profaned by the Bible's false promulgation of the rules governing slavery and the mass destruction of humanity during the Flood. He is perplexed at the injustice of a Fall of Mankind countenanced by the eating of the wrong kind of fruit, or his re-hardening of Pharaoh's heart when the Jews try to escape Israel, almost causing their doom.

Winchell doesn't like the way women are treated in the Bible, beginning with the Fall. "The Old Testament treats men with respect while women are frequently referred to as harlots and whores. Patriarchs are lauded but very few females are given admirable status in scriptural narratives. Delilah betrays the beloved Samson by having his eyes put out. Cunning Salome orders the decapitation of John the Baptist. Males that meander receive no Divine punishment. But wives that are declared unfaithful are taken into the village and stoned to death."

Whatever your take on Winchell's interpretation of events, it must be noted that his descriptions of the way that the Good Book characteristically describes God has got to be generally accurate. Most of these are not abstruse examples. Many of these are storybook examples of God's behavior, told and retold in both Jewish and Christian Sunday schools and homes. Has something been overlooked by these progenitors of God's message? Is not the author of these events slightly out of character if he is to fit the theological description of being "kind, wise, patient, loving, just, merciful, and compassionate," as Winchell so correctively describes the attributes generally given by God.

Perhaps Winchell does not know God. But he believes he knows what God definitely is not. And that must be a challenge for every reader who wishes to confront the reality of the contradiction between the ideal of God in theology and the reality of the Bible's portrayal of God. And, what then, will the reader be left with? More than a few questions and perhaps the beginning of a very difficult quest. There are no easy answers to the questions raised in www.protectgod.com. Just a whole other mission. Perhaps to protect god, we may first have to find him. And, somehow, over the centuries in which these books have been created, he has become very, very lost.

DISCIPLINING AN AREA
-What do you do with Deadwood?
By Johnny Blue Star

After having managed something like ten discreet trading areas over the past few years, I have come to some tentative conclusions of a subject that should be of great concern to many trading company managers and owners: Deadwood. By Deadwood, I mean members of a barter organization who do not actively trade, but engage the barter business' services (mostly the accounting department for billing purposes), as passive and disinterested participants. Many of these pay all their membership dues and renewal fees,

without question, but they refuse to trade. Many others just tie up collections and thwart brokers' activities by having their accounts perennially in deep freeze.

The question that I have- and I certainly would like feedback- what does it cost a barter organization to keep such a member? I personally believe, although I cannot measure it, at the moment, there is a severe negative cost. The cost is not just billing statements and processing loose slips of paper. Perhaps one comes out on top because of this, making even perhaps a \$150-\$100 a year on the deadwood. But what does it do to the psychology of trading and to the actual furtherance of transactions? Members are called upon to trade, but they refuse to for a variety of reasons. Often they refuse to even though their excuses are not acceptable in official policies of organization. Yet, they are tolerated because of the love of their precious membership and renewal fees. After all, may be their interest could be activated in a few years. Yet- what does this do for the actual progress of transactions?

I believe the policy of tolerating Deadwood stifles transactions. People can only look for an ink cartridge or a winter jacket for so long. They are not brokers. And sometimes brokers have even stricter limits on conducting searches. In one organization I belonged to, I would access a category of member in the web site and find six or seven nationally-listed members who refused to trade or, even worse, would not return phone calls or respond to e-mail.

1. Determine what constitutes an active member

In my view, there are certain fundamental criteria for establishing that a member is truly active. First, of course, that the member is accepting trade. Purchasing behavior, depending on organization and payment arrangement will vary. However, if the member goes on standby and refuses to purchase- that is a problem. Secondly, there is also a problem when non-payment of fees frequently freezes an account. Thirdly, it is also a problem when a member trades a minuscule amount, although regularly. It really doesn't do him any good or the barter organization any good.

2. Formulate a policy

I guess the question here is who stays in the organization. That is the ultimate criteria. If the goal is to have true activity, then perhaps it will be necessary to demand an average volume traded per month. Now, it is one of my best-loved aphorisms that "the road to great customer service is paved with exceptions." If a good member gets sick or suffers a sudden financial downfall or if there is a death in the family, etc., etc.- there is no need to get impatient with a member. It is the member who does not and will not trade; does not and will not pay their fees; does not and will not treat other members and officers of the organization with politeness and honesty; who inflates prices out of reality, who tries to inject cash into trading to such an extent the trade becomes mere gravy, creating excess

profits- these are the people who should be eliminated. These are the people who are sapping the life out of your trade organization.

3. **Show members the door**

If members do not adhere to the trading policies of the organization, they should Polately shown the door. This may be radical advice and it will eliminate a large percentage of a lot of barter organizations, but, what again, is the cost of this deadwood? They destroy the integrity, viability and power of the organization. The organization should be a sleek, lean, transaction-producing machine.

My last comment revolves around the ethics of maintaining non-active members just for the sake of making a profit. Is that really ethical? It's like gyms basing their economies on non-active memberships and using the courts to enforce contracts that were the result of bad decisions or, worse, intimidation and deception. I am not saying that this is true of every work-out franchise. I am just saying it is a problem that many people have noticed.

As my ideas and my solutions are somewhat tentative, I am interested in feed back from other professional barter companies, particularly from brokers and traders with a lot of in the field experience. I am also interested in some shrewd accounting guestimates as to the cost of Deadwood.