

Recommended Viewing: *Big Eden*

I recently received my copy of this new movie from a company called Wolf Video, which also carries a number of Gay or Lesbian-oriented movies often not found within the mainstream market. That the brief sales description focused upon a Gay man on the verge of artistic success in New York city, suddenly returning to his very small hometown (named Big Eden) in northwestern Montana to care for his ailing grandfather, caught my interest. That the local townspeople, many who have known him since childhood, decide to go out of their way to help him deal with issues of being Gay within a small town and finding his own sort of happiness there, was quite challenging to my understanding of "the way things are." What makes the complicated storyline possible, is that although they may be small town people, contrary to the American stereotype of small towns, their desire for his happiness is quite unconditional. There are no norms to which he must conform or leave. What is required for him to stay, is his own willingness to accept their sometimes goofy expressions of love and support. Understandably, I think, he spends a good part of the movie being emotionally confused by all of this.

Through most of the movie, I found myself with more questions than answers and an almost continual desired to holler out, "for crying out loud, would you just say it?!" But quite consistently with the American stereotype of small towns, the truth is almost never directly stated or explained and a horrendous number of assumptions guide every conversation. In many cases, the assumptions are correct, but in some they are not. It rather reminds me of the first time I traveled with my now ex-lifepartner to the town in which I grew up and warned him in advance that "everything is communicated by innuendo and if it ever becomes a problem, the final statement will be, 'well, you should have known.'" All that being said, I think I would give almost anything to be able to live among such an unconditionally supportive bunch of people, as this movie depicts.

My favorite scene of all, I think, was when the grandfather respected the fact that the artist didn't feel comfortable bluntly confessing his Gayness, and instead asked where he learned to feel ashamed of himself. That, the grandfather stressed, would be the greatest failure of everyone who loved him, if they had inadvertently taught him to feel ashamed of himself. Wow. I wish everyone could understand, all the way to the bottom of his or her soul, just how incredible that simple common-sense validation of unique personhood is. No one should ever be made to feel ashamed of who or what he or she is, nor should their individual happiness ever be described by people who claim to care about them, as being an optional matter.

As messed up as this world is, those who succeed in finding love, are truly blessed by God and who are we to disagree with that or to place qualifications on the manner or form in which God brings such a miracle to pass.

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

Summits

For those who have never climbed not just a big hill but a genuine mountain or for those who still remember what their first climb was like, one of the possibly frustrating elements of such a climb is what is often referred to as "false summits".

Imagine that you've been climbing for a very long time and just ahead, perhaps a mere ten or fifteen minutes away, at last, is what appears to be the grandest accomplishment of the climb: the summit itself.

Upon arriving at that point, however, you discover that the mountain simply levels off a bit and then continues climbing. The bump you thought was the summit, simply hid the real summit from your view. As the climb progresses, however, this scenario may be repeated several times, until you wonder if you will actually be able to recognize the REAL summit when it does in fact finally come into view.

False summits: the perception that we're almost "there", only to discover that "there" is a bit bigger and higher and farther than we'd imagined it would be. Our definition of our goal and destination must therefore continue to grow and expand, in order for the journey to continue.

If not, we will reach a false summit, lie to ourselves that it is in fact the summit when in fact it is not, and head back down the trail again, claiming a victory and an accomplishment which was never in fact attained.

Even worse, we may seek to encourage other hikers we meet along the way back down, by describing our false summit as being the expected destination,

thereby discouraging them from looking or traveling any further beyond that point.

Worst of all, however, would be to simply give up, concluding that whatever the summit may hold for those who reach it, it is no longer sufficiently valuable or available to us to inspire us to continue the journey upwards. The mountain is still all that it is. In abandoning the quest, however, we also abandon a yet-undiscovered part of ourselves, a yet un-discovered part of Life, and a yet un-discovered part of God.

False summits may in fact be beautiful and restful places to stop for a few moments before continuing on. They do have their place within the larger picture and story of the hike or climb. They each have their own unique views of the valley below. They may even be places to nourish and equip ourselves to more effectively continue the journey.

The imperative is simply that we be open to the possibility of a bigger mountain, a deeper love, a more expansive life, and a greater experience of God than we have ever believed to be possible.

As big as such a perspective would be, however, there would be no room for bigotry, prejudice, or judgmentalism within it. As big as such a perspective would be, it would be so full of God's love and light that there would be no room for hatred, no room for apathy, and no room for spiritual lethargy within it. These are all among the things which produce spiritual, psychological, and social glaucoma.

Nevertheless, no matter how much more wonderful the REAL summit is, I

give thanks for the false summits. Among other things, they keep me going. Even if I know that the high mound of stone and earth at which I am gazing is in fact a false summit, I find a sort of energy and inspiration in the exhilaration that reaching even just that next point, can provide.

In much the same way, I dare to fall in love again and again, not because I necessarily think that "this person is THE one," but rather for the brightness, the energy, and the healthiness that being in love can bring to my daily life and for the privilege of giving love to another human being, for as long as internal and external circumstances allow.

I accept that at some point in the future, I may very well be dealing with great disappointment or even heart-wrenching sadness, at the loss of that person and the emotions which accompanied their presence within my life. The loss is very painful, but it does not actually have the ability to destroy me.

I will survive and in time probably find another experience of being in love. When I do, I will again be blessed with a peculiar brightness, energy, and healthiness, which will help me on my way for a certain period of time and which will also allow me to contribute to another's life.

In September of 1990, I drove to a small farm, to purchase a longhair dachshund puppy I subsequently named Lancelot. He was eight weeks old, only slightly larger than my hand, barely weaned, and was described to me as being the runt of the litter, the one no one wanted. As he leaned against me throughout the drive home, I could not help but wonder how the story of his life with me would end.

Such is the challenge of every puppy. The expectation is that, generally, we will outlive our pets. In the case of Lance, I was present for all but the absolute final moment he died, almost exactly six years later, having suffered an extremely severe slipped disc in his spine, which had left him seventy-five percent

paralyzed. He was still very young, but we'd had quite a full life together, hiking, skiing, traveling, camping, and quite a number of other things. I was emotionally devastated for weeks afterwards, but I wouldn't hesitate to do it all again, given the opportunity.

Why? Because love is worth whatever it costs.

Why do I hike to mountain summits? Because I find something there which is perhaps a bit beyond the reach of words, something which gives wings and perhaps a divine peace to my soul. I never have to wonder, when I reach a summit, whether it was worth it or not. Somehow tired muscles, sore feet, and weary aching bones just don't matter as much as how it feels to be there, looking down at clouds, rivers, and valleys far below.

Somehow suffering through Lance's death just didn't matter as much as the love I found by sharing his life. That was the real summit: sharing the love in each moment of life, for however long each moment would last.

Now I have another little dachshund whom I've named Galahad, after the Arthurian knight who succeeded in finding the Holy Grail. He was about ten weeks old when I adopted him from the local animal rescue organization. He is an amazingly intelligent, loving, and attentive companion to me and I am so thankful (most of the time) to have him in my life. (I often joke, "do you know why puppies are so cute? So that we'll let them live when we find out how much mischief they can get into).

I am sometimes moved to wonder though, that God would package such love and energy within such a small and relatively short-lived creature. Wouldn't it make more sense to give those who are such experts at love and forgiveness, the longest and most influential lives? If so, their love and forgiveness could be taught to a very great number of others, before death effectively removed them from their instructive role.

Perhaps it is specifically within the briefness of individual lives, that the common thread of divine love and presence begins to become visible. It is not that any one person or creature has mastered a certain quality better than anyone else will ever be able to, but rather that each of us has certain opportunities to remind ourselves and the world around us, of what is possible; of what is equally possible for each of us, though in different and individually appropriate forms.

In reaching a summit, we are each once more the recipients of a divine invitation, like a lighthouse on a high bluff above a stormy sea, to shine our lights into the darkness and once more be the light of the world, bringing comfort and guidance to weary travelers below.

The rocky path we have traveled and the stones upon which we stand may be the unconventional pedestal or pulpit God has provided for us. High upon such a rocky spire, buffeted by winds, pelted by rain, and perhaps even threatened by lightning, all that is asked is that we raise our candle high. Somehow, God is the one who will keep it from going out.

So I raise my candle from whatever place of stones and storm upon which I stand, and shout into the darkness and the whirlwind, "May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!" And in the peaceful stillness which follows, God's presence abides.

*"Whatever
the present moment is,
it is NOT
all there is to Life."*

---Sister Who

Updates

Chapter 1 of *ReInventing the Sacred Clown* is finished and chapters 2 and 3 have received their final editorial comments and will soon be rewritten into their absolutely final form. Chapter 4 is nearly ready to be sent off to the first of two voluntary editors.

A video-editing computer through which new episodes of "Sister Who Presents..." will be created, is nearly finished, waiting only for one final part and a bit of testing, to be sure everything is in working order. If you, anyone you know, or any organization within your community knows of a cablecasting or broadcasting opportunity for these future shows, please send me whatever contact information is available. I would like to dramatically increase the number of places in which my television shows can be viewed, just as soon as this computer is finished and new shows have been produced. I've been told, for example, that there are quite a number of cable television channels now, which feature alternative spirituality and theatre, but have no contact information for any of these.

Preparation for participation in the week of the sixth international Gay Games in Sydney, Australia, November 2-9, 2002, continues, more or less on schedule. I have made contact with the particular chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (a political and social activism group which also does AIDS and safer sex education) which is based in Australia and will mostly likely be doing a number of things with them while I am there, sometimes and sometimes not in full makeup and costume.

On June 23, I plan to once again make an appearance at the annual (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgenderal, etc.) Pride Parade and Pridefest in Denver, Colorado, which generally commemorates the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York city, viewed by most as the beginning of the public movement in favor of equal civil rights for non-heterosexual people.

Other than all of the above, I remain available for workshops and spiritual retreats related to symbolism, cross-cultural communication, rituals, and any of the other capabilities and qualities of sacred clowns. As phrased within the Internet websites through which I offer individual counseling, when you want more than just an answer, when you want personal and spiritual growth, call a sacred clown.