



By Margaret Evans, Editor

It was a weird day already. Hearts and ashes. I couldn't quite settle on a mood. The phrase "tough love" kept running through my head.

Jeff came home from the office with two bouquets for me – I think he was making up for the one he didn't get last year – and a big sack of goodies from the Chocolate Tree for Amelia. We all exchanged cards, had a sweet bit of family time, then I headed off for the Ash Wednesday service at church, where I was singing with my choir.

After our dark, mournful anthem, we descended from the choir loft into the congregation and sat on the first couple of pews. I was just to the left of our minister, and very close, and as the congregants came up for their ashes, I could see their faces clearly. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," the preacher said, over and over. Everyone received their ashes with such solemnity – even the teenagers. The organist played "Ah, Holy Jesus" and "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" as one after another they came to be marked with crosses of ash. It was a familiar scene – we do it annually – but also strange, almost exotic, here in the year of our Lord 2018. The service fed my soul in a way too mysterious for words.

Then church was over, and I went home to watch the Olympics with my family. But it wasn't the Olympics they were watching. It was news coverage of another school shooting. As I caught up on the horrific details – 17 dead, kids my daughter's age – I could almost feel the ashes burning a hole in my forehead, though I had already washed them off. Ah, Holy Jesus. Why does this

keep happening? What is becoming of us?

And there we were on social media, doing that thing we do. I wrote about “that thing” just a few months ago, after the church shooting . . . the one after the Las Vegas shooting. I’m flat-out tired of conjuring up new ways to complain about social media and mass shootings, so I’ll just quote from that older column:

We’re all discussing this latest tragedy in that way that we always do now – the blaming way. The “you go to your corner and I’ll go to mine” way. The passive aggressive –but mostly just aggressive – way. We’re talking about “the American people” as if there were any such unified entity anymore . . . saying “we” this and “we” that, when what most of us really mean is “they” this and “they” that. The “it’s about guns” crowd is mad at the “it’s about mental health” crowd – and vice versa – and now there’s even a national battle raging over “thoughts and prayers.” Thoughts and prayers
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y’all. For God’s sake.

Yep. That’s how it was back in November, and that’s how it was the night of the Ash Wednesday/Valentine’s Day massacre. And as I write this, that’s still how it is . . . right down to the thoughts and prayers. (Some continue to offer them sincerely, while others condemn the phrase as a meaningless platitude.) We are a nation divided – in a thousand ways, both great and small – and none of our institutions, not even the church, can span those divisions, stitch up the rips in our ragged social fabric.

But I have hope in my heart as I write this, and here’s why: Because of art.

I’m one of the luckiest people around, because my job as editor of this publication requires me to immerse myself in the work of artists on a regular basis. Not just the visual artists who grace our covers and beautify our pages – though, oh, how they nourish me – but the musicians, the theatre folks, and the writers, too.

This issue has been a particular joy to produce. I had the pleasure of interviewing A.J. Croce – Jim’s son – who’s performing a concert at USCB March 3rd. His passion for his music shines

through that interview, and when he talks about playing his dad's stuff . . . well, read the article. Also, check out Margit Resch's piece about Ronee Boyce, the pianist who's coming to Fripp Island. She sees music in color. (For real!) And then read Michael Johns' article about the upcoming USCB Chamber Music concert. Both Resch and Johns write about music so delightfully, their articles are works of art in their own right.

For this issue, I also interviewed award-winning writer Anthony Grooms, who'll be at Penn Center the day after the A.J. Croce's concert, for the Conroy Center's second annual March Forth on March Fourth event. Tony's new novel *The Vain Conversation* was the final manuscript chosen by Pat Conroy for his Story River Books imprint. It's a novel of staggering power, one that examines America's race problem with profound honesty and generosity of spirit. When I finished reading it a few months ago, I posted on my Facebook page: “

If humanity is ever to evolve, if we are ever to rise to our potential – and that seems like a big *if*

sometimes – I believe it won't be through political squabbling and jousting for power, but through the great, brutal, compassionate vision of artists like this one. Thank God for good books.”

And then, of course, there are the filmmakers. This week is the 12th Annual Beaufort International Film Festival, and as major media sponsors, we'll be there from start to finish. (Don't miss our coverage starting on page 15, and visit our Facebook page for interviews, pics, and more throughout the festival.)

I've often thought that movies might save the world, so the filmmakers are very special to me – the high priests of our popular culture. For me, a great movie is nothing short of a religious experience, and for a growing number of Americans, I believe theaters now serve a purpose much like the one churches once did.

Hear me out. You're with a large group of people, sitting quietly for a sustained period of time, offering your rapt attention. You're watching closely and listening with your heart. Maybe you're moved to tears, and maybe you hear others crying, too. You're taken out of yourself, together. A collective catharsis. When it's all over, it's even possible you burst into spontaneous applause. You feel changed. Forgiven. Redeemed. You can't wait to go out and spread the word about what you've seen and heard. As you leave the theater, you smile at everybody you see. They are your sisters and brothers.

Feed Your Soul, Save the World

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor

Monday, 19 February 2018 13:47 - Last Updated Tuesday, 20 February 2018 09:09

This is what a great movie can do. It's what *all* good art can do. Tear down defenses. Build bridges. Bind us in our common humanity. Help us love one another. A good story, well told, can bring the tallest, sturdiest wall tumbling down in a way that a "political statement" – a ribbon on the lapel, a catchy hashtag, a haughty lecture – simply can't.

This is one reason people still flock to the movies but are abandoning awards shows in droves.

I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. Heck, I'm not even telling you anything I haven't said a dozen times, right here on this page. But I'm saying it again, because it seems to me that now, more than ever, we all need to get ourselves to church. If ashes and organ music aren't your thing, head on over to the USCB Center for the Arts for our local – international – film festival, or the A.J. Croce concert. Drive out to Fripp and hear some colorful piano music, or out to Penn Center for some powerful poetry and prose.

You want to save the world? Start by feeding your soul.

Margaret Evans is editor of Lowcountry Weekly. Read more of her [Rants & Raves here](#).