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WORLD NEWS AND POLITICS**EMPIRE OF THE SUN UNDER ATTACK: JAPAN'S EARTHQUAKE, TSUNAMI & NUCLEAR THREATS**

—Amaterasu, a sun goddess, is one of the most revered deities in Japanese mythology. She was represented on battle armor and her symbol appeared on the former flag of Japan. Mythology tells the tale of Amaterasu's grandson, Ninigi no Mikoto, who descended to Earth and initiated a divine lineage, where the Japanese emperor was soon considered a god. Today, the Grand Shrine at Ise evinces the importance of this deity in Japanese culture. Composed of more than 65 complex structures, the Grand Shrine is the main shrine of the Shinto.

Followers of Shinto revere forces of nature and *kami* or gods. Every quarter of a century, the structures in the Grand Shrine are destroyed so that newer and older generations can participate in the rebuilding process.

The power of this long embedded tradition will be much needed in the coming days, weeks, and months as Japan struggles to recover following the largest earthquake to hit its soil in more than 140 years.

Sitting at the edge of a horseshoe shaped, 25,000-mile line along the Pacific Rim known as the "Ring of Fire," or the mouth of the sun goddess as I like to call it, Japan has certainly learned to live in harmony with the *kami* in good and bad times.

On March 11, 2011, Japan clamped her armor and marched into battle as earthquakes ripped through her seafloor and raised 30-foot waves that swallowed lives and swept away cars and buildings like toys. The quake was so powerful that it shook towns and cities hundreds of miles away, including the country's capitol, Tokyo, several hours south of the epicenter.

A nation that has lived by the way of the gods, Japan has learned to use some of her god-given powers, the ability to split atoms and harness nuclear energy in her 54 nuclear programs. But the gods are not ready to fully relinquish their roles yet, as evidenced by the imminent nuclear meltdown following the aftermath of the recent earthquake. Truly, the gods continue to test the Japanese samurai spirit as explosions from the Fukushima nuclear plant sent radiation spewing into the air and forced men in white suits to risk their lives by going on a suicide mission in a desperate attempt to pacify a brewing storm, while the nation's emperor made a rare appearance to stress his concerns.

Japanese citizens must now not only deal with the emotional turmoil from the loss of their loved ones who were either swept away by the sea or buried in the rumble of collapsed buildings and roads, but they must also cope with hunger, thirst, cold, and the fear of radiation exposure from a nuclear meltdown.

The *kami* life force has descended upon the Japanese people. Now they must make use of their ability to perform another special feat, recovering from an 8.9 earthquake that jolted global markets, tore homes down and lives apart, and moved the island nation more than half a dozen feet.

**RICHARD QUAN****Managing Editor**

EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION PROVES THE POWER OF THE INTERNET—The world slowed to watch history unfold. The protests started on January 25, the Day of Wrath, when thousands of Egyptians took to the streets to protest poverty, unemployment, government corruption and the autocratic governance of President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled the country for thirty years. Two-thirds of Egypt's 79 million citizens have never known another ruler. The government responded by blocking Twitter, which was being used by organizers to coordinate the protests.

Blocking Twitter only enraged Egyptian citizens and brought increased national attention to the uprising. Officials blocked Facebook while riot police took to the streets, arresting and injuring hundreds with batons, tear gas and water cannons. Protests occurred not only in Cairo, the nation's capital, but also in Alexandria and Suez, two other major cities.

Two days later, Nobel Laureate and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Mohamed ElBaradei returned to Egypt from Vienna, ready to lead the protests. ElBaradei is considered a potential Egyptian successor to Mubarak.

The Muslim Brotherhood, long a fierce opponent of the Mubarak regime and officially banned from Egypt, threw their support behind the protestors, many of whom were young, tech-savvy Egyptians.

With protests growing, the government blocked all Internet services in the country. With Twitter and Facebook already down, email and other social networking outlets also fell, including text messaging. Yet protestors and journalists found alternate means of providing information online.

All of which leaves one to conclude that knowledge is indeed power.

Mitch Albom, a syndicated columnist and Detroit talk show host, once ranted against Facebook in the aftermath of a teen suicide tied to Facebook, saying, "Nothing good can come from social networks."

Really? Not even the downfall of a corrupt government?

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The Tunisian government also was unable to censor information from reaching Tunisian citizens, even as they reportedly carried out phishing operations to confiscate user passwords and monitor online criticism.

All of which leads one to consider whether the Internet has revolutionized the modern revolution.

Will we see more similar government overthrows in the future? Only time will tell.

Corruption in government it seems is becoming increasingly more difficult to hide from prying eyes.

Case in point: WikiLeaks, an international non-profit organization that publishes private, secret, and classified media from anonymous news sources.

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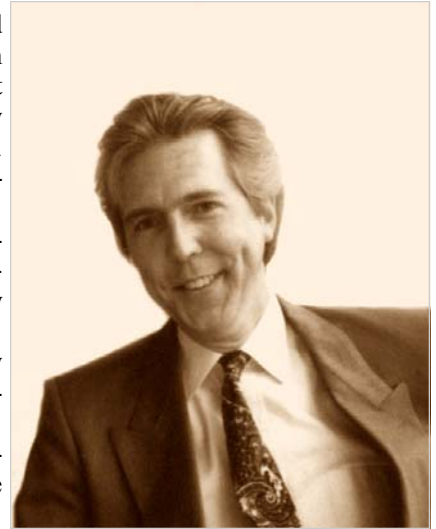
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I understand the need for state secrets; yet a fear of transparency leads me to wonder what our own government is hiding from us.

No government is benign, and sometimes the greatest evil is one that masquerades as good.

Can you imagine a revolution similar to those in Egypt and Tunisia taking place in this country?



J. Conrad Guest
Contributing Editor

Hiding vegetables from kids is in—(and mystery meat explained)

IN 1981 THE USDA held serious conversations over whether to reclassify ketchup as a vegetable. This piece of bureaucratic flim-falmmery was immediately pilloried in the press, rejected by an appalled public, and consequently dropped by the Reagan administration.

The concept is back, but this time it's the major processed food-product companies who are busy doing the convincing, and they seem to be succeeding where the USDA failed. Americans are eagerly embracing Sloppy Joes, jarred sauces, and cans of spaghetti that allegedly hide a full serving of veggies as long as they guarantee a hassle-free meal with their children. But whether these products really provide a balanced, healthy meal and a *real* serving of vegetables, how such conclusions are reached, and what criteria they are based on, is not fully explained in the ads. We are only told that kids will eat it, if you don't tell them what's actually in it.

Right... kids eat worms, mud pies, and Play-Doh, as well as unlocked poisons, cleaning solvents, and pretty colored pills if they can get their hands on them, so pardon me if I remain unimpressed by this touted achievement. I'm more interested in how these manufacturers can conclude that some highly processed puree is the same thing as a fresh vegetable.

Even if most of the puree, or all of it for that matter, is synthesized from actual vegetables, is that really enough to claim it's the same thing? It could be a 100% vegetable-based product and still not equal a vegetable nutritionally or otherwise—hear me out:

The human body, we are told, is 77-98% water (there is a bit of a scientific debate over the exact amount, so let's just say it's mostly water.) This means, by ad-speak logic, a glass of water contains at least 77% human heart.

Is corn sweetener considered a vegetable? How about gluten? The food thickeners derived from kelp? Where exactly is the line drawn? At what point in its processing does a vegetable cease to be considered a vegetable? And is a vegetable something that can be tested for and quantified? Let's not forget, melamine appeared to be protein in standard food tests.

But, let's set my skepticism of these vegetable equivalency claims aside: what is the societal goal here? Or is there only a capitalistic one? And what does this desire to hide-the-vegetables-in-the-goop as a marketing strategy say about our current culture, our relationship with the natural world, and especially, our willingness to create a generation who has to be tricked into eating their greens?

Up until now these processed food substances were generally used as a last nutritional resort for those unable to chew and swallow on their own and were pumped through a tube, in a process known as gavage. Now they are appearing in snack foods, candy bars, and energy drinks. They are sold as the healthier alternative to real food. More nutritional than real food. And kid-friendly.

Food Putty: it's not just for your comatose grandma

anymore!

But it gets weirder. The class-action federal lawsuit against Taco Bell flips this debate on its head: Taco Bell is accused of serving taco meat that is more filler than meat. The amount of meat to filler is the point of contention. But had Taco Bell merely claimed the fillers were hidden vegetables, they'd have been lauded as helping us raise healthier children—lawsuit solved. (An interesting side note: the USDA only requires that these types of processed meat products be 40% meat.)

Whether Popeye should trade in his spinach can for Spaghetti-O's or Charlton Heston should have looked into what percentage of human being was actually in those crackers, I leave to you. As for me, I'll keep my veggies intact and recognizable, thank you very much.



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Egyptian Revolution Proves the Power of the Internet by J. Conrad Guest

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THE WORLD SLOWED TO WATCH HISTORY UNFOLD.

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J. CONRAD GUEST is the author of Backstop: A Baseball Love Story in Nine Innings and January's Paradigm. His third novel, One Hot January, also from Second Wind Publishing, is due to be released in early 2011. His fiction and essays appear in various online and print publications, including Cezanne's Carrot, Saucy Vox, River Walk Journal, 63 Channels, The Writers Post Journal, Redbridge Review, and Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine. He is also the cofounder of The Smoking Poet. Photo courtesy of Sommerville Photographie.

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A Journal, Alice Hoffman and the Promise of Redemption by Davida Goldberg

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MY PASSION FOR WRITING was sparked through beginning a daily journal. I have found my journaling to be both a blessing and a curse. I have always felt that I am at my best as a writer when writing journal entries. When I write I tend to focus on the workings of my inner world while paying scant attention to the outer world, which tends to work nicely for a journal or a blog. However, I am left with the question of how to translate the expression of my inner world from journal entry into something that I can present to a larger audience. At present I am attempting to compile the past few months of journaling into book form. As I transpose my handwritten pages from paper to laptop, I find myself doubting that anyone would be interested in reading about my inner struggles and thoughts. Why the need to publish a diary anyway? The journal is my safety zone and I am scared to wander too far from it. With the journal if I wrote a page a day for an entire year I would have a book written. It would have happened without my expending the energy or effort to create plot, character development or worry about how to come up with enough content to produce something of significant length.

I want to write. I need to write to connect to my soul. I have told myself many times that I should stop writing, as what are the chances that writing will take me anywhere productive in my life. However, it never works. I can never get myself to walk away. Sometimes I feel that I only really exist and become visible to myself and to the world when I write. When I don't write, I don't know who I am and I feel lost and cannot make sense of my life. Writing helps me to put the pieces of the puzzle together; it gives my life meaning and direction.

There is a common theme in my journal entries. That theme is a painful and consuming need to express myself. If I could start over again I would have gone to graduate school and studied film, journalism, or English. But I didn't know myself well enough then; I mistakenly believed that my path was to be a psychotherapist. After accumulating significant student loan debt and investing hours of class and internship time I realized that I chose wrongly. My nature is not that of a therapist. I have found it exhilarating and terrifying to realize that my true nature is that of a solitary person that craves creativity. I yearn to have the power and control to create worlds and paint pictures through words. When I have a pen in hand I feel as though I am holding a paintbrush. I become an artist painting a picture on the page through the beauty, elegance, simplicity or complexity of words. My journal has been my crutch, but ultimately it is not enough. I cannot truly paint the pictures that I want to paint through my journal. I know that the fulfillment of myself as an "artist" will only come about through writing fiction. The prospect of beginning and finishing a piece of fiction is quite daunting, as I worry that I will surely run out of steam mid-way through.

I recently wrote an article about author Alice Hoffman visiting the Margaret Mitchell Literary Center in Atlanta to

promote her latest book the *Red Garden*. Ms. Hoffman is one of my favorite authors, so it was quite a pleasure to do a write up about her, and to meet her in person at the book reading. I am not a person that seeks out autographs or that is overly impressed with celebrity. However, I could not pass up a chance to have Ms. Hoffman sign the inside cover of my journal. As she was signing my journal she asked me if I write fiction. I said that I write articles, however, I want to write fiction. At that point Ms. Hoffman looked up at me and said with all earnestness, "Then you will write fiction." In that moment, I felt as if Ms. Hoffman could see into my soul and that she glimpsed my full potential and my deepest desires. It felt as if with those five words she was making a proclamation about my future. I left the Margaret Mitchell Center that night feeling as if I had been given the go ahead to pursue my dream of being a novelist and that somehow everything would eventually work itself out.



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*The blood won't dry in my veins as much as the thoughts in my mind won't stop,
It all ensues, little by little, sometimes with grandiose leaps and bounds,
But it's all constant and regular, perception is flighty,
Dry as my hands are my soul won't weaken,
There is no warning this time, no flashing beacon,
Just life, relative and tolerated, you haven't waited, no one did,
Fingers bare, rings once dug, not to occur, life has all begun to blur,*

*Untidy sprinklings of words with full meaning, the shocking glance,
At once demeaning, the put-down puts you nowhere without consent,
That shoulder offered to lean on is seldom upon leant,
Consolidated misdemeanors collected and swept under the carpet,
Of a lying smile as treacle-sweet lies drip from a ruby-red mouth,
And rot your consuming teeth, look around at the atmosphere you built,
The Snow White clung to the cold pavement and showed us pretty,
But caused us torment, beyond prior belief*

*Carry a burden for as long as you want only, cracked skin may let the light in,
But it burns and this they won't teach you, look under a rock in the rainstorm,
And it will be dry, dry.*

Find yourself a personal shelter from the storm and decorate it carefully.

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IN 2008, AFTER A PAINSTAKING SEARCH for the perfect house, my parents decided it was crucial that they guide me in my effort. They found me this newly painted 1948 dilapidated Bauhaus surrounded by a destroyed wood fence located at Bowman Avenue in Merion Station. The public schools in this area were supposed to be superior, but I wasn't desperate, and living conditions was a priority. The infiltration of weeds in the fauna that surrounded the house didn't frighten me. As a matter of fact the statuesque oak and the majestic maple made a grand statement of elegance as we entered the property. Even the living room was appealing. The rope iron railing guided me to a wonderfully molded fireplace with an art deco mirror etched to match and light streamed through the windows giving an essence of paradise. There were only a few torn carpets and if they were raised, you could see that Bruce's fresh finish would redeem the original oak wood floors.

However, as we explored the remainder of the house my heart, like a broken elevator, plummeted to the floor. A nauseating stench infiltrated the next room and worsened with rot and decay as we continued. The kitchen was corroded with a deteriorated floor covering and the sink and various accessories appeared to originate from a broken down cabin from the 1800's haphazardly built in the woods.

Behind the kitchen was a creaking stairwell that led us to a basement that smelled like putrescent dead animals. Infested wood slats lifted the washer and dryer among corroded junk as if it was a safe keeper from flooding that had infiltrated this basement a myriad of times. Another room was positioned to the right of the steps, but the queasiness stirring up in my bowls shortened my investigation. As we continued exploring the rest of the house, it became apparent that new plumbing was inevitable. The tiled bathrooms were cracked and every inch needed some type of reparation. I couldn't handle it. However, my parents found me another house in Penn Valley that I could manage. After living there for a week, my parents informed me that they were moving into the ramshackle I had rejected.

How my mother and father acquired their foresight always became apparent after the fact. They moved in and began their renovation. They slept on a blow-up bed, washed themselves in the one semi-useable bathroom, placed a huge dumpster in the driveway, and began cleaning and throwing out the stink.

As I watched them strip the basement and take out the recess ceilings along with warped doors and walls, the old 1970's solar system that was never used, junk, falling rods and shelves, I was thankful that this was them and not me. Then I realized that they too were happy to be doing what they love most. Every day my mother called, chatting with excitement about the painters and carpenters – how they were cleaning the stainless steel hardware for the doors, painting and resetting the flaps that were falling out of their hinges and bumping against their frames, and rearranging the clothing rods so that there would be more space in the closets. She directed the electricians in order to eliminate any wires that were outdated and made sure this house was wireless. My mother was optimistic about her undertaking.

Skillfully blending the old with the new, one fixture was left in the TV room and the rest were replaced. After nagging and

insisting that the original sinks and tiles needed to be saved, the plumbers acquiesced. My parents delighted in their pursuit. They even saved the original rusty tub to harmonize with the white tiles making sure every inch sparkled as though it was brand new. Only the base was painted so that the original porcelain was saved. Mold and oxidation had ruined some of the tiles and the toilets from the 40's were not fit for my mother's standards. The possibility of saving the old rusted 1948 mirrors was hopeless, so they replaced the recess mirror medicine chests with new ones.

The kitchen was in worse shape than they had realized. There were five layers of putrefied uneven floor coverings that needed to be stripped to the beams. However, after this grueling prerequisite, my parents installed a magnificent mahogany floor. The stainless steel counter top, my mother designed, extended around the kitchen in order to make a breakfast booth enriched with three contemporary leather stools. All of a sudden, the plethora of trees bejeweling the windows that outlined the kitchen, like a Monet painting, became a picturesque paradise.

At ground level, my parents spread their love. They removed unwanted ivy from the trees, trimmed dead branches, pulled undesirable weeds, and planted a magnificent vegetable garden. They fixed the broken wood and locks on the fences. Later I was to find out the multi-talents of my mother when she rang my bell offering me giant tasty cucumbers and tomatoes from her new garden.

My children love to come and play at my parents' renovated place. I could never have handled the effort and finesse my parents exhibited. Their insight and fortitude were more than admirable. It was a house that I could not have purchased but now that it is restored, I pray that they do not sell it.



*ALLEGRA S. COLEMAN began her creative career hosting TV shows at the age of 12. After earning her BFA in theatre, she continued to perform in diverse roles including playing Shakespeare's Puck in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and Lulu in *The Dutchman*. Her favorite job was with *The Magic Mirror Theater Company*, a children's improvisational traveling show.*

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But beauty itself is not given to us by anyone; it is a power we have within us from the gate, a radiance inside us.

---Marianne Williamson

I ATTENDED A WRITER'S WORKSHOP, listening to wonderful personal stories of both disappointment and triumph, as only a writer can present it. I sat back and soaked in.

I've heard it said that "if it was easy everyone would be doing it." I agree with this statement. It can be applied to so many areas of life, and listening for a couple of hours reinforced this.

Getting published the traditional way is very difficult. Today's economy doesn't help either; major publishing houses are in difficult times financially. The industry is changing with digital publishing becoming more prominent, and it's tougher than ever for a new author with an undeveloped platform to break in. Agents routinely receive 100 or more queries from authors each day, all hoping to stand out from the rest and have their manuscript chosen for further consideration.

Despite the odds, the room was full.

Having a passion for something defies logic sometimes. Webster's defines it like this: *a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept; intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction.*

Having a passion involves feeling an emotion for something. It's something that you have experienced. My passion for photography came over time, the process of learning to take what I see in my head and reproduce it on film and digital media. I did not have a passion for photography before stepping into the waters and trying it out. It was the same story with my writing. What I have found is you can create amazing results when you have a genuine passion for something, whether it's a career, hobby, social or religious beliefs, or anything else you deem as worthwhile.

This beauty within us is powerful. We can achieve amazing things when we're driven from within to not only achieve, but also excel.

We can touch other's lives in such a way that their own experiences are enriched. Inspiring to achieve. And inspiring them to not lose sight of their own dreams.



CRAIG ELLIOTT is the owner of *EE Productions*. He is a portrait and media photographer with corporate background in telecommunications. His passion is photography. Craig is currently working on his first book.

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THE ENDEAVOR OF RAISING A CHILD in our multifaceted society can be assisted by quality entertainment. The Parents Choice® Foundation, founded in 1978, describes itself as “the nations oldest guide to quality children’s media and toys.” Some of the criterion used to evaluate products & materials consumed by kids is its ability to entertain; yet subtly teach. They endorse what stimulates imagination, which at its best might lead a child into further reading. Themes espoused are important to review and ought to embrace values that the family believes in; a movie that appeals to people of different ages. Yet, this is where the challenge presents itself to filmmakers. Family films are particularly challenging for those who are 3D resistant and interested more in “slice of life” storytelling. Reflecting back on the archives of films from this genre, the sheer volume of material that starred Shirley Temple and the timeless messages strikes me:

In 1934, Fox Film Group released a Civil War-era film, *Carolina*. Shirley had a small role that made a big impact on audiences. This veritable scene-stealer was given top billing by the end of that year in *Stand Up and Cheer*. By the next year, the studio became the “20th Century Fox” that we know today, and they were responsible for churning out more than 20 family oriented movies starring the most popular child star ever. Their leading lady was only part of the equation, the stories were uplifting and championed values of compassion, tolerance, kindness, honor, and perseverance. Some of the films took us abroad to places like Shanghai, India, and Germany where we learned about different cultures through the eyes of our little stowaway, the orphan, or the privileged daughter of a high-ranking military man. One of the most prevailing themes that ran throughout these pictures was that circumstances were fleeting; yet ingenuity and a strong character is the everlasting coat of arms capable of turning around the most bleak of times. *The Little Princess* faced challenges and cruelty, but never let her situation get the better of her. Characters of all ages and stations were captured in these films and the enduring messages were embraced around the globe. Can stories depicting harsh situations from the eyes of child, while interfacing with the adults that populate their lives, find a place in today’s cinema? Of course animation is a sure fire way to fill theatres with kids. However, until recently, these flicks have often been less appealing to the chaperones. While those fantasy films that suspend reality and stimulate imaginations with live action have been extremely prosperous ever since the first of its kind, *The Wizard of Oz*, hit the big screen in 1939 and then along came *Mary Poppins*, *ET*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Dr. Dolittle*, to name a few. Transporting kids along with their parents, nannies and grandparents is not only profitable, but the shared experience offer talking points for families facing unique challenges of their own.

Disney stands out in this arena, responsible for producing the time-tested films that have peppered so many of our childhoods with a collection of hits. These types of films spike

ticket sales. When speaking to families through film it’s important to uphold the efforts made by parents in shaping the characters of our children as well as entertain them. Make them laugh and kindle imagination. Beloved family films drawn from family life have also been well received: *The Sound of Music*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, *Karate Kid*, and the *Home Alone* franchise. Macaulay Culkin’s character “Kevin” was as precocious and charming as Miss Temple in his day. It seems we want to see films that co-mingle adults with kids in such unique sketches. Sports films that the whole family can enjoy are DVD’s well worth having on hand as they are adept at showcasing the sort of qualities and habits that’ll see one through difficulties. *The Bad News Bears* nailed this with humor, bringing together an ensemble cast that were relatable to a variety of ages. Disney’s *The Rookie* also managed to get inside the hearts of many. And when a studio needs a slam dunk family hit, think of those that star engaging horses with a back-story like *Black Beauty*, *Flicka* and *Secretariat*.

The gray area within the genre is knowing when it is indeed a family film, when it’s not. Some parents have learned the hard way that just because a kid stars in it, doesn’t always make it kid-friendly; think *Paper Moon*, *My Girl*, *The Good Son*, *Daddy’s Little Girls* and *Hardball*. These picks require more discernment than young audiences might have on hand. The same goes for high-caliber films like *The Empire of the Sun* or *Slumdog Millionaire*, which offer prominent parts to child actors and valiantly tackle history or social ills.

While the “coming of age” films that every generation has, does not generally fall into this category. These reflect back to us our youth - the youth of our generation - in that critical transition into teenagedom. Who wants to watch *American Graffiti*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* or *Superbad* with your parents? We didn’t.

It would be great to see more movies that the whole family can enjoy together. And, not just in animation and on the holidays.



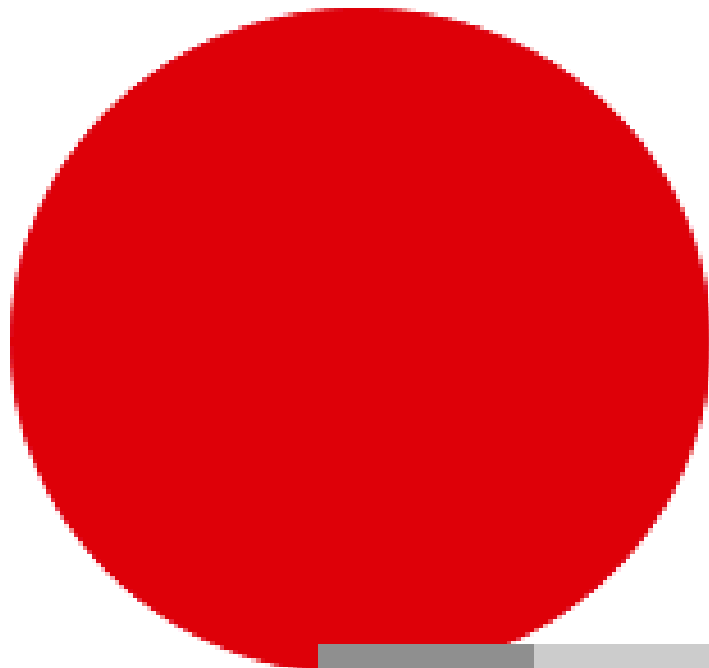
ELISA DIMITRIA BOWMAN is a filmmaker. She is the producer of *Dear Willie*. Ms. Bowman served as production resource executive in the production of major motion pictures and television shows such as *Will & Grace*; *Runaway Bride*; *Beverly Hills 90210*; *Striptease*; *Multiplicity*; *Nixon*; *The Getaway*; and more. She also served as production coordinator and director’s assistant in projects such as *Fashionably L.A.* and *Ringer*.

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