

Mil Mania

The Official Newsletter of WWW.ARTISTINSANE.COM

Volume 5, Issue 1, January 2009



Welcome To The January Issue of Mil Mania!!!

Welcome to 2009 — and the year's first issue of *Mil Mania*. And, while the year may be "new" already it's provided much material for the columns herein — including a recent show by Brian Fitzpatrick covered in the "Music Mayhem" section, a great film discovery shared in "Ravings of a Mad Woman" — and some excellent questions sent in for both "Molly Madvises" and "Psycho Therapy".

It also marks the continuation of "Writings From the Asylum" — which proved, in fact, a surprise to me, even if not to *Mil Mania* readers. I had initially planned to merely provide a short conclusion and/or perhaps an epilogue after the developments shared last month. Upon further consideration, however, I've brought Josh and the band to New York City, where their adventures in the music business will (indefinitely) continue.

In other areas, a few (mis)adventures in home redecorating have brought a bit of humor to the "Temporary Insanity" column, and another tale from "Mil's Menagerie" fills "Pet Peeves and Paranoia"...the latter having perhaps been permanently instilled in one of our pets! I urge you to read the article lest that sentence seems unclear. In fact, I urge you to read *all* of the articles herein — and, as always, feel free to e-mail me (mil@artistinsane.com) with comments on these, and suggestions for more to come.

Lastly, I'd just like to call attention to the box at the top right of this issue. If, indeed, you enjoy this publication every month, by all means, please share it with family and friends. While Henry V proved just how much might be achieved by a "happy few", when it comes to my brand of madness, I believe, "the more the merrier"!

Thanks again — and best wishes for a Merry 2009!

Mil

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Member of...



and...



All Content Written By Mil Scott Unless Otherwise Noted

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ATTENTION

Mil Mania Readers:

With a New Year upon us, I want to extend an extra special thanks to all current subscribers — and encourage you to share *Mil Mania* with your friends. Feel free to forward this issue and encourage signing up for future ones (plus, newcomers can check out all back issues on the subscription page:

www.artistinsane.com/news_sign_up.htm.

Insanity's contagious — pass it on!!!

Newsletter Spotlight



Happy New Year!!!



plus...

A Bit of Literary History...



Jan. 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of Edgar Allen Poe's birth (more info available [here](#))

AND... the 250th of Scottish poet Robert Burns... the latter fact doubly appropriate since his Auld Lang Syne has long become associated with ringing in every New Year. (www.robertburns.org)



Both serve as reminders of how much can be achieved in a short amount of time (having passed at ages 40 and 37, respectively) — and thus challenge us all to make every day of THIS year count.



Music Mayhem



Brian Fitzpatrick played a fantastic — and fantastically *full* — double set of music at Big John's Pub in West Milford, NJ on 1/17 — a show I was privileged to attend. You can check out a web page recapping this great event at www.artistsane.com/big_john's_1-17-09.htm (P.S. I apologize for any tech issues viewing this — my website's been experiencing a few difficulties of late.)

In other news, as mentioned in last month's issue, Brian opened for Ryan Cabrera at Mexicali Live on 1/23. And, from what I've heard (and the photos shared on Facebook) this seems to have proved a huge success as well. Let's hope more amazing doors continue to open for this incredible talent.

Michael McDermott has continued to keep a rather low profile this month, with only one (very favorably reviewed) show in Jan., and a mere smattering of these currently scheduled for the months ahead. Watch www.michael-mcdermott.com for further info.



As always, feel free to drop by my "space" at

MYSPACE MUSIC

(www.myspace.com/artistsane)

AND

My Profile at

facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/profile.php?id=711026302&ref=profile>

Psycho

Therapy

Disclaimer: I am not a "real" psychiatrist... nor do I play one on TV.

Dear Dr. Mil,

It's been said, and I agree, that how we choose to dress/accessorize ourselves says a good deal about us. Hair can definitely fall into the "accessory" category. Five-out-of-five gals I know made a decision to chop most of their long tresses off shortly after they said "I do." This fascinates me... No. It irritates me! All five gals who did this didn't seem to really like their new do-s at all. Why should a major life step have to be represented with an out of control clipping session? What is the psychology here?

Loving my Locks

Don't forget...

Mil's Mercantile



The All Occasion Online Shop of Items Featuring Photos of Mil's Menagerie...

(including greeting cards, postage stamps, shoes, tote bags, mugs and more!)



New Valentine's Day items just added!!!




Go to www.zazzle.com/artistsane and see for yourself!

Dear Loving,

For whatever reason, long hair is often associated with free-spirited youth, whereas shorter, more "practical" styles are thought more "appropriate" to reflect increased maturity. It's therefore my speculation the women you speak of made the common choice they did in order to comply with real or perceived societal expectations.

As is often the case for this column, however, I did a bit of internet research (after writing the first paragraph), the bulk of which explained the primary reason for marital lock lightening as a matter of convenience. (Obviously, short hair is easier than long to maintain on a daily basis.) Some sources cited the difference between a single versus married lifestyle (less "me" time for either party), others noted merely a desire for change. Of course, if one's making the major life change of getting

married, I suppose it seems an excellent time to take the lesser plunge of a new "do".

While the above reasons may seem relatively benign, it might be argued some other forces in play (and even certain instances of those already mentioned) are, in fact, symptomatic of deeper issues, and in some cases, real psychological problems (which will very likely lead at some point to marital difficulties as well). For instance, if the impetus is indeed an attempt to live up to some image of what a married woman "should" look like, the question is raised as to *whose* ideal the woman is striving for. If it's truly a matter of her own preferences, comfort or otherwise a "healthy" decision, she should proceed with no guilt or second thoughts (regardless the shock to her friends or acquaintances). If it's a mere preference of her husband's, and one she feels comfortable experimenting with in the interest of marital give and take, again this seems little cause for concern. And, I suspect in many of these cases (a theory my research confirmed), the woman finds short hair not her cup of tea, and it soon begins to grow again to a more accustomed length.

Since ancient times, however, long hair has been perceived by some as not merely one aspect of beauty, but a significant tool of seduction. And, if a woman is disposing of this as something no longer needed to "land" a husband — or, if her husband "demands" she do so, out of fears or insecurities regarding potential interactions with other men, this is clearly psychologically dangerous territory that needs to be further scrutinized and firmly addressed. In the former case, one has to question the woman's image of marriage in general (and her reasons for entering into it), whereas the latter sets off any number of alarm bells regarding potentially oppressive levels of control — a subject, incidentally, brought up by another reader, whose questions on this topic will most likely be dealt with in next month's issue.

To conclude this one, however, I'm reminded of the timeless advice, "To thine own self be true" — rephrased in the context of smokers vs. non-smokers (in an excellent Kenneth Branagh/Emma Thompson movie called *Dead Again*) "Decide which you are and be that." I can think of no better advice on this "hair-razing" topic than for each woman to settle for herself the "long and short of it", and based on her

discovery decide “to cut or not to cut”.

Clearly we know which you are — and more importantly, you do, too. Congrats on this assertion of your own good mental health.

“Dr. Mil”

Don't forget to check out Keela's review of *The Tale of Despereaux* (movie version) in the January issue of *It's a Rat's World* magazine.



And, watch for more articles by me in the months ahead!

Writings From The Asylum

As introduced in the first issue of *Mil Mania*, this column presents the latest chapter in the “prequel” to my screenplay, *Taking the Fall*. You can read the Prologue at http://www.artistinsane.com/of_julie_and_better_men.htm, and past chapters in the prior issues posted on the *Mil Mania Sign-up page* (www.artistinsane.com/news_sign_up.htm) — with the exception of last two installments, which have yet to be added.

To recap where Chapter 18 left off, while looking for a guitar string to replace one he'd inadvertently broken during a late night burst of songwriting, Josh made a surprising discovery in the spare guitar case under his bed: a bank envelope of cash, left for him by Julie just before her suicide. Along with the note that accompanied it, this find re-invigorated Josh's quest to succeed in the music business, though left no clear answers as to his next move in attempting to make this happen.

Part II

Chapter 19 “Forward”

Josh and the band filed off the plane at JFK and made their way to the baggage carousels, a map of New York City already in Tommy's hand. Carefully studying the tangle of roadways and transit stops, he plotted their next move in the direction of a new era for them all. Silently focused as one on this endeavor, Matt dropped from the group momentarily to buy several newspapers, four of which were soon opened to the “Apartments for Rent” section of the classifieds. Josh, having at last taken the giant leap of leaving his comfort — or rather, of late, *discomfort* zone called L.A., instead knelt over the carry-on in which Sultan had made the trip, attempting to reassure the wide-eyed feline that, unlike for the rest of them, life, pretty much exactly as he'd known it, would continue.

“You're gonna get out of there soon, buddy,” Josh calmly intoned. Certain Tommy was close enough to overhear, he went on, “Yeah, we're gonna have to put up with these clowns for a while, but —”

Josh broke off in reaction to the good-natured shove that served as Tommy's reply. “Hey, I'm just talking to my cat here,” he retorted in mock indignation.

“Oh, sorry,” Tommy responded. “I didn't see you down there playing on the floor. Should I go buy you a set of jacks or a GI Joe, little fellow?”

“You can buy me a new ass after sitting on that plane all day.”

“Tell me about it,” Tommy replied. “And maybe we could throw a giant bowl of pasta in with it. I feel like I haven't eaten in years.... Hey, there's our stuff.”

Turning his attention to the carousel, Josh watched the band's collective possessions approach, quickly joining the others in pulling off suitcases and gear, together building a small mountain in the middle of the terminal.

“Who's got the rental agreement,” Matt asked. “One of us better go pick up the van so we can start getting this crap out of here eventually.”

“Here you go,” said Tommy, after a quick shuffle through his paperwork. “And, Chuck, why don't you and Randy go pick us up some sandwiches or something. Josh and I should have everything ready to load out by the time you guys get back.”

Scanning the carousel for the last stray items as the others walked away, the two removed the final pieces, and took seats on the pile. Looking around the airport, then back each other, a smile started on Tommy's face, and ended with a shake of his head in wonder.

“What?” Josh asked in mild puzzlement.

“Look at us, man. Here we are sitting on top of everything we own, with no idea if we're gonna wind up with gigs or a record deal — or having to hock all of this for the fare back to L.A. And, I couldn't be happier.”

“We're not going back,” Josh replied firmly.

“I know we're not,” Tommy agreed. “And, I don't want to sound all parental or anything like that.” He grinned. “Besides, you're older than I am, anyway...”

Josh grinned back. “Yeah, by a whole month, sonny boy.”

Growing serious, Tommy continued, “Anyway, I just want to say... well, I'm proud of you. I mean — I know we went through a lot of sh— the past few months. Wow, have we been through a lot of sh— in the past few months... But, the thing is...you know...comparatively speaking...it was always easy for me to tell you to just get over it and keep the ball rolling — *our* ball rolling. I mean, I've always been married to the music. I've never had to deal with stuff like you did when you were with Julie...and then to *not* be with Julie, and...”

“It's okay, Tommy. You don't have to...”

Writings From The Asylum Chapter 19 (cont'd)

“No. I do have to. I just — I have to say... I get it — as much as someone who isn't you *can* get it. And, I'm just...I'm glad we're here. I'm glad *you're* here. And, I'm glad to still be part of this crazy ride you started us on with your songs way back in high school.”

Tommy paused briefly, as Josh looked down and shrugged self-consciously. After a short moment, he continued, “She was right, you know — Julie...in that note she left with the money. That stuff about believing something good was out there for you.” He paused again. “I believe it, too.”

“Thanks, man,” Josh replied. “But I've got to disagree.”

Looking pointedly at the pile of belongings, as Chuck and Randy returned laden with fast food and Matt pulled up out front, he concluded with certainty, “The way I see it, my ‘good’ is all in here.”

Matt hurried toward Josh and Tommy, as Chuck and Randy leisurely explored the contents of their bags, preparing to dig in. Matt just shook his head, a gesture speaking louder than words the thought “some things never change”. Looking to the saner members of his band, he directed his question to Josh.

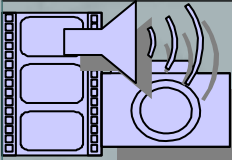
“Are we ready?”

His answer came back without the slightest hesitation, “Yes, we are.”

Tommy caught Josh's eye and gave a short nod of silent agreement, as they all grabbed cases and bags and headed for the door.

“Bring it on, New York,” he beckoned. “Are you ready for us?”

Within minutes they were loaded and the van took off in the direction of the setting sun. And, though they did so fully cognizant of the finality so often associated with such images, never had this group of musical adventurers felt so sure they were, indeed *finally* heading toward a bright and promising dawn.



Ravings of a Mad Woman

This column corresponds with the Mad Ravings On section of my website (www.artistinsane.com/new_page_8.htm)

and is dedicated to selected reviews of movies, television and books... most of which are unlikely to represent “the latest” in any of these categories, but rather a random selection that represents a new and/or noteworthy discovery to me.

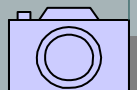
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Miss Potter — Though a film that sparked very little fanfare upon its release (albeit one my research shows garnered a fair bit of gentle praise), I found this work absolutely astonishing — on a number of different levels, and in the best possible ways. Not only was I shamefully unaware of the title character's immense contribution to the literary world (Beatrix Potter, in fact, became the best-selling children's author of all time), neither was I at all familiar with her great love of animals (including pet rats), nor how this became a central underpinning of the characters she created — and her particularly strong connection with their reality.

It must be said, of course, that I have no idea how accurately the film captures the factual essence of Miss Potter; taking this at face value as presented, however, she quickly moves from a first impression as a quirky enigma (nearly dismissed by publishing firm executives) to a mature and self-possessed artist — one both secure in her individual identity, yet fully open to new possibilities in both friendship and romantic love.

Of course, life seldom follows a perfectly happy storyline, and the film clearly illustrates Beatrix Potter's firsthand acquaintance with difficulties, frustration and grief. Born in a society where young women were expected to make “suitable” matches with young men of appropriate standing, her mother strongly disapproved of her inexplicable willingness to face life on her own terms — even if that meant facing life on her own. And, long after success as a writer had become a well-established fact of Miss Potter's life, to her mother it remained a mystery both how she might survive and what on Earth was wrong with her for embracing such an odd existence. Thankfully, not everyone shared her mother's views, and Miss Potter was therefore blessed with great acceptance in her lifetime. What's more, she continues to touch others through her beloved pictures and words...not to mention, of course, through this truly wonderful film.

On a personal note, I'd like to add that I've always shied from the term “hero” and refrained from openly bestowing this title on anyone (other than occasionally my beloved grandfather, which is a story for another time and place). As this film concluded, however, I have to admit it was this word that immediately sprang to mind — simply because I saw in this character indeed nearly all to which I aspire. Though she created her work for the sake of the art itself, she was practical enough to seek its publication — yet not presumptuous enough to expect that would translate to her financial “ship come in”. One of the most poignant moments of the film, therefore, is her complete surprise that her art had become just that...and that with or without her mother's approval, she would likely never have to be concerned with money for the rest of her life. Her determination to see her work published to her specifications — a trust in her own artistic judgment as its creator — is likewise something I tremendously admire, as is the understanding of literature's “reality” — i.e. the power of its characters and lessons to truly “live” in their own right, and become friends who are a valued part of one's existence. Her quirkiness may have set Beatrix Potter apart from the “normal” folk of Victorian England, but the truth of the matter is she proved just crazy enough to change (resoundingly for the better) her little corner of the world...and a few corners beyond. And, if you know anything about me at all, you already know how inspiring I find that kind of insanity.



Comments from Mil Mania readers on the December issue...

"The mystery of lovely Molly remains. So close! It seemed so logical that this is how and why she showed up to be a part of and form your lives in the ways she did. Did I use 'mystery' and 'logical' in the same thought?? Still we wonder and thank God for the unknown 'Whys?' in life like this one."

L.P

"How on earth were you able to pick up "Molly" - get her to come to you? I'm surprised she let you come near her. People find stray cats all the time, but a stray rat? What a wonderful story!"

C.D.

"I so love hearing your fur children stories, and I look at rats much differently now; knowing that they too are loving and appreciative creatures... I too am grateful for Molly."

S.W.

"I had to tell you that I loved Keela's chat on the painter topic. I'm about to forward the newsletter... so I thought I'd let you know. And Dr. Mil's chat was outstanding as well!"

A.R.

"Thank you so much for the Christmas greeting...Such beautifully expressed sentiments that get to the heart of the season. Wishing you and yours peace, joy, and love that abounds..."

C.S

"Thanks for your card. I really look forward to it."

L. D.

"As always, the prettiest and most poetic card is yours. And the story of the little lost rat - aaaww, how cute!"

P.G.

"...your card (again) - so beautiful."

N. H.

"We look forward to your card each year and always share it with our friends. You are so talented!"

M. S.

"Thanks for the beautiful Christmas poems every year. We love them."

J. Z.

Temporary Insanity

Friend... or Faux



Every winter my husband and I embark on a host of home projects. Some are what I suppose technically fall under the category "renovations" — such as hanging a new door in the basement, laying a glueless laminate floor, or installation of sheetrock in a new room addition a couple years back (an experiment that proved successful — but sufficiently unpleasant to insure hiring a professional for that service in the future.) Most, however, merely constitute "redecorating" — which we seem to forget from year to year is synonymous with various other terms...such as "frustration" on the mild end of the spectrum, and all out "torture" when things (invariably) go (always too far into the job to back out) somewhat awry. Actually, I take that back. The truth is, nothing need go awry at all for the latter term to come into play. Usually, in fact, this applies when we've realized (too late) we've bitten off more than we care to chew — like, about halfway through faux finishing the dining room ceiling via the "tag on" method — when it suddenly dawned (at about 2AM) that to complete the job would mean viewing all objects at a 90 degree tilt for the next several days. Never mind the questions why our necks had frozen in a position not unlike one I recall seeing in previews of that old Will Farrell film, *A Night at the Roxbury*...you know, the one where the protagonists are bobbing their heads down to their shoulders in sync with some endless dance song. Anyway, I suspect you pretty much get the picture of the morning after faux finishing upside down — and how effectively this practice can, uh, "finish" its practitioners.

Of course, to remind you yet again that one definition of insanity is repeating the same behavior expecting different results, it wasn't more than two days after this first all too real "faux" experience that we did, indeed, decide to tackle the living room ceiling as well, not to mention (eventually) those in both bathrooms and the aforementioned new addition.

Thank God we don't have a bigger house; running out of room(s) isn't always a bad thing.

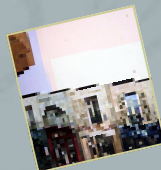
Sadly, the above represents one of the more pleasant tasks, in retrospect. Wallpaper, by contrast, has proved an even more challenging "faux" (which spelling I use here having already proved this clearly equal with its homonym f-o-e). Thankfully, we generally stick to the simpler border form of this (and vowed to keep doing so after once pasting, removing and re-pasting the lower portion of an entire room with the full-sheet variety. Twice. Or was it three times? A repressed memory to be sure — not to mention a décor choice I won't be pressed into revisiting anytime soon.

And, you wonder why this newsletter is so often sent out late.

Back to the border, like faux finishing, we've attempted this on a number of occasions, yet seldom, if ever, without rethinking the decision once committed. Either we've run out 6 inches short on the final wall or found pre-pasting to require *re*-pasting, or ended up with one pesky wrinkle at the only spot that actually stuck like concrete on the first try. And, what force, I ask you, causes that Murphy's Law-type outcome of a piece you've carefully measured, held in place, and measured again before cutting, never failing to wind up an unconcealable half-inch from the window or outlet around which you've cut? Who says such objects are "inanimate" anyway? In my experience, they certainly seem to possess (a most "possessed") life of their own.

Most recently, we decided to freshen up the kitchen with a new Paris storefront scene — choosing a border slightly wider than the prior one to simplify the removal aspect of preparation. Of course, that meant the new border was that much trickier to install, as it fell at different spots below the cabinets, above the stove, etc. And, of course, it entailed that impossible job of cutting around a window — in this case, leaving only about a two inch strip that had to not only line up correctly, but somehow be kept from ripping while balancing a twelve-foot-long piece and affixing this to the wall. I'll admit that at one stage, I felt certain that window might just come in handy after all.

Be that as it may, at last this project was completed — without either of us succumbing to *running for* the border, and miraculously, no flooring, appliances or animals winding up harmed in the process. Unfortunately, now the paint scheme doesn't quite match...and the muted, multi-colored background of the Paris shops cries out for a more suitable complement. With that in mind, I suppose I'd better end this column here and go get started. And, if next month's newsletter doesn't arrive quite when expected, at least you've been notified just what menacing faux's to blame.



Pet Peeves and Paranoia

A Small But Mighty Mouse

Back in early November, just a few weeks after the staff at our vet's office had discovered the mice who became (our pet mom) Orvietta's youngest children, they found yet another...this time a single, very tiny little rascal — one who conjured images of the book/movie character Despereaux (discussed in Keela's column below), in that his eyes were already open when he arrived — even though he seemed far too young for this to have occurred naturally (prompting one to wonder if, as in Despereaux's case, he might actually have been born this way).

Aware these things only occur in fiction, however, we expected his behavior to prove far more like that of a normal mouse (as did Despereaux's parents, we should have perhaps recalled) — assuming that is, he even survived long enough to exhibit any behavior whatsoever. For, this mouse was SO small, and so unpredictable in accepting his early meals of milk, that we were (though, of course, hopeful) not greatly expectant that he might be with us for more than a few days.

The mouse (now known as Austin), however, had other ideas. Survive, he did, and soon, in fact, he began to grow and thrive — or should I say, more “thrive” than “grow”, as he remains these many weeks later, far from what one might call large, even for a mouse. More than that, however, he is most definitely not “normal”. And, again, his oddest quirk is one he shares with the fictional Despereaux: bravery. Austin, you see, has no idea he's a mouse...or, if he does, has no interest in acting like one.

Just before Christmas, we purchased a storage unit that required assembly. Just before we were about to tackle this, Austin emerged from his (oatmeal box) bedroom and begged to be let out of his cage. I therefore hoisted him up and tucked him inside my shirt, where he enjoyed his usual antics, such as running up and down my sleeves, peeking out at the neck periodically, etc. As it happened, also “helping” with the assembly was a mild, wholly sweet-natured young male rat named Wellington, who was taking everything in from a vantage point on Andre's shoulder. Of course, if you know anything about rodent interactions, you may already be aware that rats are natural enemies of mice, and will (other than when raised together as in Orvietta's case, anyway), in fact, kill them — a circumstance I should have been more mindful of in allowing my tiny pal to ride around (as the process of putting this storage unit together brought them) in such close proximity to a “predator”. As it turned out, however, it was the poor rat who had reason to be afraid.

Absorbed in the project at hand (and given the feather lightness of Austin, which makes it easy to lose track of his exact location in my shirt), I never gave it a thought when holding two pieces together for Andre to secure them, Austin happened at that moment to be sitting on my shoulder — eye to eye, as it turned out, with Wellington. Instead of attempting to scamper away unseen, however, Austin decided his best hope was to strike first — resulting in a mighty leap directly onto Wellington's nose! Whether too shocked, too frightened, or simply too kind to respond in like fashion, Wellington merely let out a small squeak and I quickly snatched Austin away...though I'm still not sure he wasn't disappointed in my doing so. And, you can bet I've since become a lot more careful in how close I bring Austin to Wellington — or any other predators — rats, cats... hyenas — for the predators' protection.

Austin, evidently, can take care of himself.

(P.S. Give Austin to your Valentine — http://www.zazzle.com/austin_valentines_day_love_card-137575115403003557)

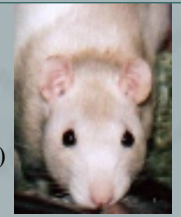


Molly Madvises



MOLLY

As per the precedent set by *Dear Abby* which syndicated column retained that title when passing to its originator's daughter, so this column continues to retain the name of its originator though now written by another. The “madvice” currently offered herein is that of Keela, one of the “noisy neighbors” Molly (introduced in the Dec. 2005 newsletter linked here... http://www.artistinsane.com/Mil_Mania--12-05.htm) spoke of frequently — and who, like Molly, knows a bit about life as learned by her adventures as a rodent single mom. Also like Molly, she has a strong mind of her own with much rat wisdom to share. I hope you'll enjoy her commentary



E-mail your “Molly Madvises” questions to mil@artistinsane.com and I'll pass them on to Keela. Thanks!

That said, on to this month's question...

Dear Keela,

*“I don't want to talk about it.” Now, that is a powerful statement. Complete assertion of N-O. Unwavering. No. Clearly, no. No. And it came from you—well, you actually said that you “really didn't” want to talk about it, in your review of the book *The Tale of Despereaux*. That came as quite a bite to me? This, sort of out from one who has many wise words and can “chew on” some tough topics. I was so startled at your initial thought that my peanut butter-iced waffle narrowly escaped toppling from my fingertips! I eagerly read on and discovered that it was quite the opposite. You raised sound points, engaged me in true Keela fashion and concluded in as much commitment as you began. I gobbled up the last few waffle crumbs and gave your initial thought a big “HA!” Something that holds so much “flavor” for one cannot be cast aside so easily. And, Oooo! There hid one last waffle bit under the napkin. Mmm.*

Shortly after reading your review, a friend inquired about an upsetting family situation in my life. Your voice entered my head and I grabbed at the words, “I don't want to talk about it.” She did not persist. But, Keela. I “really did” want to talk about it! I just didn't know how. The topic would take a lot of energy and focus. Bring up all sorts of emotions. Was it worth it? So, I'm wondering. When we say “I don't want to talk about it,” who really loses out?

All Clammed Up

Dear Clam,

I think you've raised an excellent point and I promise I'll address your question in detail momentarily — I mean, momentarily. First, though, I have to get the image of your “peanut butter-iced waffle” out of my head — and maybe go ask Mom if she has any of the frozen type of those left she might be able to pop in the toaster to help me think! And, boy do I love peanut butter...although I heard about a rat in Arizona who choked on this one time, so be sure to spread it *very* thin and try to take small bites. (His mom got it all out and he was okay, by the way.) But, I digress...

Let's see — where do I start chewing on this topic of talking and not talking and what all of that really means to say? Well, in the case of my book review, I really *didn't* want to talk about it initially — the whole misunderstood idea it puts forth that rats are evil and such. I mean, there are actually a surprising number of *good* books about us out there, so I'd rather think and talk about (and review) those... to help show people just how smart and lovable and *rat-astic* my species is!!! Besides, I don't think *The Tale of Despereaux* is a very well-written or interesting read, anyway. It's kind of poorly arranged, and has a lot of really unlovable characters, and doesn't show all that much imagination, if you ask me. I know that's just one rat's opinion, but to tell you the truth, I think the only reason it got any *rat-tention* at all is because the hu-woman who wrote it had success with some other book she wrote about a horse — an animal much more popular than just about any rat or mouse — so somebody decided everything she writes from then on is great. Well, as far as I'm concerned, (aside from the very cute main character mouse, anyway) this book is garbage. And, contrary to what Emile and Remy's dad tried to let on in *Ratatouille*, rats don't eat garbage if there's anything better available. Plus, you only need to look at *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* or *A Rat's Tale* to know there's much more than garbage for readers to savor at the local library.

The thing is, I never thought this silly book would get all that much notice — and I wasn't about to give it any extra. But then, those misguided hu-people who apparently gobble up everything this (very possibly well-meaning, but hugely uninformed) hu-woman writes decided to make a movie out of it (like they did out of the horse book), and suddenly I didn't have much choice. As I've said before, I'm sort of the Punxsutawney Phil of random, so it was up to me to screech for rats everywhere. I simply *had* to talk about it.

But, that doesn't mean talking about it was easy — or that I really wanted to when I did. It's just that if I was going to start I wanted to make sure I made it clear where I was coming from...and why I feel so differently from the “experts” about how great the (nasty) thing is(n't). And, I think that's probably where your question fits into this answer. Because, whatever the situation that made you scurry away from talking about it, it's obvious you have a strong opinion on the matter. So, if you do start talking about it, it's going to make your fur stand all up on end like happened to me, and then you're going to have to take a lot of time explaining exactly why that is. And then you're going to get hungry from trying to smooth out your fur and maybe you won't have any waffles in the freezer or peanut butter in the pantry — or after you eat the peanut butter your tongue is too tired or stuck to work on your fur anyway, and it just gets into this whole chain of frustration...not to mention a tummy ache. So, it seems like it's probably easier to just say “I don't want to talk about it.”

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Because, if it's something you really *do* want to talk about — like you said your situation was — then it just makes your fur stand up trying so hard to *keep from* talking about it. And, you think about what you want to say so hard that you get hungry, anyway, and you run into all the problems — right down to the tummy ache — that you were trying to avoid by not talking about it. So, if that's the case, it's probably best just to dive right in and start talking and get it over with. Just make sure you have lots of water with you at the time. It helps wash down the peanut butter — and smooth out your fur.

To wrap this up, then, I'd have to say that (as so often applies in life) the most important thing is to sort out what you really want, and think before you act. Sometimes there are topics we actually don't want to talk about, and sometimes there are ones we just wish we didn't *have* to talk about. If there's nothing to be gained by doing so — if it's not going to help you or anyone else by talking about it, then don't waste the energy...cause odds are in those cases the result will be *having* to talk about why you decided to talk about it when you probably shouldn't have and the whole circle starts again. And, if it is going to make a difference for your or someone else's good, then explain yourself as calmly and carefully as you can, go smooth out your fur and move on. You'll feel better once you have — at least I know I do.

Right now, though, I'm feeling a bit hungry...better go see if the waffles are ready!

Thanks again for writing — and keep those letters coming!

KEELA

In A Nutshell

In light of this month's Newsletter Spotlight featuring Edgar Allen Poe, here are a few quotes by this legendary writer...

“If you wish to forget anything on the spot, make a note that this thing is to be remembered.”

“I have become insane with random intervals of horrible sanity.”

“I don't believe in ghosts but they have been chasing me my whole life.”

“Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears.”

“Depend upon it, after all... Literature is the most noble of professions. In fact, it is about the only one fit for a [hu]man. For my own part, there is no seducing me from the path.”

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Thanks for reading this issue of *Mil Mania*! And, remember, this is a work in progress, subject to various changes — all aimed at an improved publication. Please send me your thoughts, including all suggestions. Thank you!!!

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