

The Thing Is Is . . .

By Jim Turner

There are some really cool scenes in the 1988 movie *Bull Durham*, and one of my favorites features Crash Davis (played by a young Kevin Costner) speaking to Annie (played by a younger and very attractive Susan Sarandon). The conversation surrounds the relationship between Annie and the rookie pitcher, "Nuke" (played by Tim Robbins), and in it Crash says to Annie, "I'm not interested in anybody who is interested in that boy." I loved the movie and have seen it many times. Most of it was filmed in downtown Durham in the old Bull Durham Athletic Park. The scenes involving Annie's house were shot about four blocks north of my then office on Mangum Street. This probably influenced my attachment to the movie, but even if it had been shot in Burbank, it would still have been a fun story.

In 1971, nearly a year after being discharged from the Army, I accepted a job as a Veterans' Employment and Training (E&T) Specialist that was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and assigned to a state agency. It was initially intended to be a temporary job, but its scope grew and the success rates rose so it was given permanent status. At that time, increasing attention was being placed on getting our returning Vietnam veterans back into the workforce—and special emphasis was directed toward those with disabilities. During the same timeframe, the military was finally acknowledging the validity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and the thinking was those seeking help might more easily identify with someone with military experience who could speak the same language. I'm still not sure how an English major met the skill set for the position, but somehow I did.

Training for the E&T Specialists was an obvious prerequisite to being effective. Our education was tasked to the Development and Training Unit of the State Personnel Office and, during one of our initial sessions, I encountered someone whose

We are living on this planet
as if we have another one to go to.



REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

unusual speaking delivery left me stunned. For emphasis he would say "the thing is is . . ." and then say what the "thing is" was.

When I first heard him say this, I was reminded of the theatrical term "detrimental empathy," which basically means that the audience becomes so absorbed by the actions of the performer that they disengage from the actual play. A good example is when one of the actors moves so dangerously close to the front of the stage that the audience becomes concerned that he or she will fall over the edge. They forget what the character is saying or the plot that is unfolding. So I was completely absorbed by this trainer's statement and I missed the point of instruction he was attempting to make. Afterwards, I found myself just waiting for him to say it again and continued to lose track of points he was attempting to make. Like most things, though, I eventually developed a resistance to "the thing is is" distraction and life moved on. But every now and then the statement revisits my psyche and I can't get it out of my head. It's like a bad song you hear on the car radio that just won't go away.

So what does this have to do with anything, especially the month of February and our Happy Endings project? I'll get there and promise I will recognize all your contributions in just a little while, but I need to get some other things off my chest first.

I need to talk about Dennis "the Menace" Rodman. I want to say to all news media: I'm not interested in anybody who is interested in that guy. I no longer want to read your printed news on his antics or watch your talking heads discuss his every move. And, for heaven's sake, please don't let me hear him sing happy birthday to North Korea's leader one more time. Enough! On the other hand, I could really use an update on Lindsay Lohan. Where is she, anyway?

So much of what happened in 2013 focused on violence, mayhem, stupidity and politics. But I am being redundant. 2014 is off to a good start and must certainly represent an improvement over the defunct 13th year of the new century.

The thing is is the Happy Endings categories for 2014 already appear to be limitless and there are still eleven months to go. There is a civil war brewing in New Jersey with the opposing generals being the governor and a mayor. Meanwhile, those who debunk the existence of global warming are pointing to the recent arctic air flows brought by the jet stream as evidence that all is well on planet earth. Just stick your little bare foot out the front door if you need proof that it certainly ain't getting warmer. And the North Carolina mountain town of Brasstown ushered in the New Year by lowering Opie the possum in a box attached to a rope. Times Square faithful, eat your hearts out. Looks like we will have fun, fun, fun 'til daddy takes the T-bird away.

So, let's move on to the question of awards. Many of you were very generous in your comments and thoughtful with your winning picks. However, some of you got personal. You raised questions or offered suggestions, and to you I need to say, (1) "That's not physically possible"; (2) "No, my mother did not drop me on my head when I was a baby"; and (3) "My middle name is not Bubba and you need to view the movie *A Christmas Story* again to be reminded how bad soap tastes."

But now, the votes have been tabulated and certified as accurate by a panel whose names are being withheld because they refuse to be associated with me. But I will give a big thank you to Bill, Bill, Dick, Chuck and detective Bob. So here are the winners:

The Best Fire Truck Float in the 2013 Morehead City Christmas parade goes to . . . Beulaville Fire Department. The 43 entries in this category made the selection difficult, but judges ruled that the Beulaville crew tossed the best variety and most pieces of candy and had the most obscene siren.

The Best Insertion of Foot-in-Mouth is awarded to . . . Ms. Paula Dean for—well you know for what.

The Best Worst Thing winner was not even close to the nearest challenger. The 2013 champion U.S. Congress was a repeat as the worst governing body in the history of Congresses and actually slipped below the previous session in lack of productivity and public favorability.

The Best Newspaper Headline in 2013 was a unanimous choice and goes to . . . *The News & Observer* for its December 15 report, "Fast-Moving Snowstorm Creeps Toward Northeast." You just can't make up something like this.

Thanks to all of you for your input. Join me in bidding good riddance to 2013 and wishing good hunting for 2014 Happy Endings awards.