The Muppets

By Chaplain Cory Vrieland

Friday evening my wife talked me into going to the Benny Decker theater and watching the movie The Muppets. Now I am not suggesting that this is an example of cinematic excellence. Those of you who have seen the movie may remember that early on there is a street dance scene that is particularly nauseating, with everybody singing, "Life's a Happy Song".

"Everything is great everything is grand.
I got the whole wide world in the palm of my hand.
Everything is perfect its falling into place.
I cant seem to wipe this smile off my face."

I was in a particularly bad mood on Friday (yes, that happens to chaplains too!). I agreed to go to the movie thinking it would improve my mood. But after that song I was began to have second thoughts. I don't know about you, but in my world there are precious few times when I can say "Everything is great, everything is grand." Friday afternoon was definitely not one of those times.

Fortunately for me the experience got better. One of the attractions of a movie like this is the nostalgia factor. I had forgotten about the Electric Mayham Band with Dr. Teeth on the keyboard, the long-haired hippie Janice on the guitar and "Animal" working out his aggressions on the drums. It was fun to remember Fozzie Bear with his corny jokes and Dr. Bunsen Honeydew with his round, bald head and his thick glasses. I couldn't get enough of my favorite characters-- the "glamorous" Miss Piggy and the two cynical old guys who always sat in the balcony. By the end of the show, my mood had improved dramatically.

As I left the theater, however, I realized that the Muppets effectively teach some important lessons about life. The Muppets remind us that every one of us is unique, and that we need to appreciate the unique characteristics of ourselves and of those around us. Kermit the Frog is a wonderful example here. One of the songs he would sing laments the fact that he is green.

"It's not that easy being green,
having to spend each day the color of the leaves.
When I think it could be nicer being red, or yellow or gold
or something much more colorful like that.
It's not easy being green
when it seems you blend in with so many other ordinary things
And people tend to pass you over 'cause you're
not standing out like flashy sparkles in the water
or stars in the sky?"

Have you ever struggled with your uniqueness? Those personality quirks you bring to the table? The military is a place that values "uniformity". We all dress alike, and the pressure is strong to conform to some ideal image we might have of what it means to be an officer, a chief, a Sailor, or a military spouse. Kermit reminds us: it's OK being green!

". . . green's the color of Spring.
And green can be cool and friendly-like.
And green can be big like an ocean, or important.
Like a mountain, or tall like a tree."

It is in our uniqueness, not in our uniformity, that we find our giftedness.

This valuing of uniqueness is not only true of ourselves, but is also true as we look at others around us. The Muppets are a wonderful example of what we in the Christian tradition call grace. Everyone is unconditionally loved and accepted for who they are. Kermit is deeply sensitive and very insecure, yet he is accepted by everybody as the leader. Animal is violently out of control, yet that rebellious energy is transformed when he is put behind a set of drums. And Miss Piggy, of all people—overbearing, self-centered, clumsy and fat—is the one who has won the heart of Kermit—and of all of us.

Last month we celebrated Black history month. During the year we will also celebrate the contributions of Hispanic-Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, and women to the military. Some of us come from the rural communities; others of us from the big cities. Some of us are from the South, others from the Midwest, and still others from the East or West Coast. Some of us are outgoing, others introverted. Some of us are athletic, some creative, and some intellectual by nature. When we embrace our own unique giftedness and the unique strengths and abilities of those around us, rather than judging them because they are "different," we are able to come together and put on a show that amazes everyone. Except those two old guys in the balcony.

Transition benefits: Outplacement firm helps Sailors launch new careers

By MC3 Andrea Perez, Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

MILLINGTON, Tenn. – Navy's contract for job search and assistance to help Sailors separating by the Enlisted Retention Board (ERB) is well underway, an official said Feb. 17.

"Navy has contracted Challenger, Gray and Christmas, Inc. (CGC), an outplacement service company, to personally coach and assist ERB separating Sailor's transition to the civilian workforce," said Transition Assistance Program Manager Capt. Kate Janac. "The Sept. 1 separation date is approaching and ERB Sailors should immediately contact CGC via a toll-free number or email to begin their job placement process."

An employment outplacement service assists clients in making the transition to reemployment. Founded in the early 1960s, CGC has more than four decades of experience in the career transition industry.

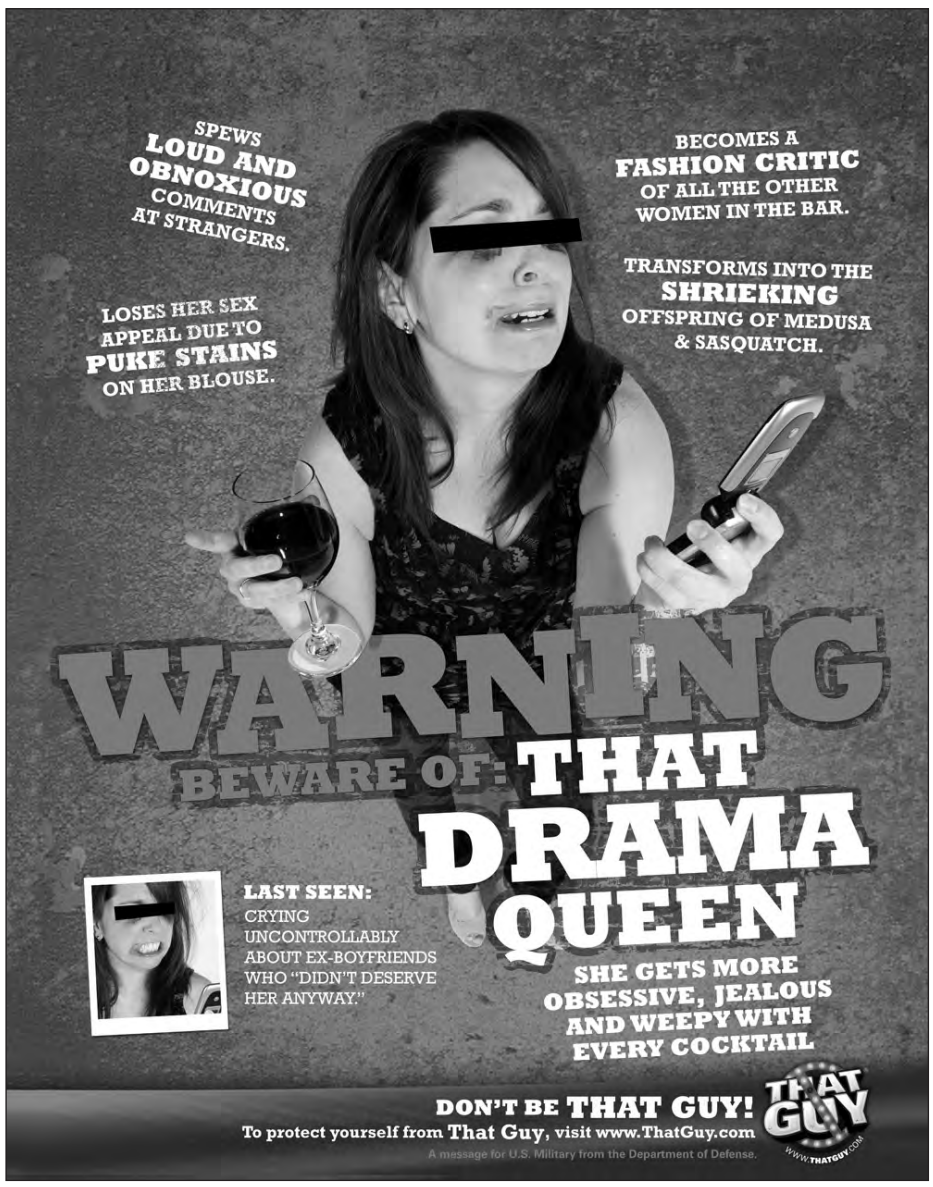
The CGC team provides Sailors with individualized career assessment and professional resume writing, job search and preparation for interviews. The company assigns each Sailor a civilian coach who proactively works their case through each step of the process and also a prior military advisor to help in the transition.

"Our goal is to connect every ERB separating Sailor to this service. Command leadership needs to encourage and provide Sailors opportunity to enroll and move forward," said Janac. Those stationed overseas or deployed should also initiate contact and will receive support tailored to their unique situations.

"What really stands out is the high level of individual and professional service our Sailors will receive," said Janac. Sailors can engage with their coach to learn the skills needed to develop a personal marketing plan customized to their expertise and specific goals.

CGC began contacting ERB Sailors via email in December. Approximately 1,000 Sailors are using services provided by CGC, a third of eligible recipients. CGC representatives have joined Navy Personnel Command's Fleet Engagement Team during its briefs in fleet concentration areas to facilitate enrollment.

ERB separating Sailors should contact CGC using their toll free number 1-800-971-4288 or email CGCUSNavy@challengergray.com. Sailors can then work with their coach to establish an account on the CGC website, found at https://www.icareermanager.com/login/challengerTops/login.aspx.

For more information, contact the NPC customer service center at 1-866-U-ASK-NPC (1-866-827-5672) or email cscmailbox@navy.mil.

For more information about transition benefits visit the Transition Assistance Web Page available under the Hot Links section of the Navy Personnel Command at www.npc.navy.mil.