

# A Christmas gift from one of our own

By THOMAS G. PALAIMA

Austin, Texas, is blessed with many creative people. Among the most gifted is William Broyles Jr., a native Texan whose many talents continue to shower us with gifts that have the staying power of the Energizer rabbit. His latest present, hand-wrapped during six years of hard collaborative work with actors Tom Hanks and Helen Hunt, director Robert Zemeckis and artist Andrea Broyles, tops my list of holiday gifts for family, loved ones, and even those of us who are alone during this most social of seasons.



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I suspect that many people know Bill Broyles in different ways and have different reasons for thanking him as the holidays approach. When we pick up the Texas Monthly to find out the latest political, economic or cultural redefini-

tions of Texas, we can thank Bill Broyles. The magazine took vision, energy and lots of hard work on the part of Bill, his fellow founding editors, and all those who worked with them. Many of us enjoyed the television program "China Beach" and the film "Apollo 13." We can thank Bill Broyles who helped create these meaningful works of entertainment.

If you are interested in the phenomenon of war and how it affects human lives, you should have read Bill Broyles' essay "Why Men Love War," now conveniently anthologized in The Vietnam Reader. You can also read the UT Press paperback reissue of "Brothers in Arms," his personal story of an Oxford-educated Vietnam veteran from Texas going back to the country where he fought and embracing the humanity of the people who fought against and with him and other young Americans. He did this a full decade and a half before that other Bill visited Vietnam.

You may also know Bill Broyles for his strong support of inclusive educational projects such as the new St. James Episcopal school in east Austin or the 25-year-old Open Door Preschool, whose dedicated teachers serve children in east, central and south Austin in an



Photo by Francois Duhamel

Tom Hanks stars in 'Cast Away,' written by Austinite William Broyles Jr., who lends support to many local causes.

environment which is a true melting pot of young future Austinites of all races and creeds, including children with special needs. Our son learned elements of sign language there before the age of 2.

My own defining "Bill moment" occurred after I had invited him to talk to 18 Plan II honors students at University of Texas at Austin in my course on the literature of war and violence. I knew how busy Bill was, so when I received his call a few days before class, I assumed he had called to cancel. When he started out by saying he had had a bicycle accident in Austin traffic and suffered a painful shoulder separation, I thought my instincts were confirmed. Bill was only calling to apologize that his presentation might not be so well-prepared or focused, given the disruption of his schedule and the pain-killers he was taking. In fact, his open and honest discussion with the

students was the highlight of their semester and of many of mine to come.

In true "Gift of the Magi" spirit, gift follows upon gift. Now Bill Broyles has given all of us a Christmas present quite literally wrapped up in Texas. It is the motion picture "Cast Away," and it opens and closes with scenes set out in the Texas landscape that we all love.

I do not want to give away the plot. But I can say that it is rated PG-13, which has two meanings that I urge everyone to take seriously. The first is special to this film: "Please Go" and take your friends and family. The second is the normal meaning: "Parental Guidance." Take your children, your godchildren, your nephews and nieces, your Little Brother or Little Sister, and talk to them about what you have seen and experienced together, about what is meaningful and important in life, about the many distractions and

seeming necessities or must-do obligations of our modern fast-paced world. And let your teen-agers and pre-teens talk to you about what they would do if "cast away" as Tom Hanks is in the film, how they would feel, and how they would resolve the problems that face Hanks' character when he comes back to 'normal life' and the people who love him.

Hollywood takes a lot of bashing either for promoting violence and immorality or for being so mindless as to trivialize important human issues. "Cast Away" entertains us, engrosses us and addresses what it means to be human for ourselves and for others. See it, enjoy it, think about it, talk about it. Merry Christmas.

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