

Bill Rea ? Some people do smoke



The daily torrent of emails I received Friday told me of a series of rallies planned for the following day by young people across Ontario and New York.

They were to be calling for provisions to have movies in future be rated for adults only if they depicted smoking.

According to the media release I received, this effort was being hosted by the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies and Reality Check of New York. These people apparently fear that if youngsters see smoking on the screen, there's a greater chance that they will take up the habit, and that of course carries health implications.

While I am no longer a smoker (and I haven't been for more than 20 years), and am ready to support any move that would discourage people from taking it up, I am sometimes left to wonder if there aren't groups and individuals taking this battle a little too far.

I have been to plenty of movies over the years, especially in the days when my wife and girlfriend was just my girlfriend. We often went to two, and sometimes three, movies per week. And I was regularly going to movies long before Beth and I became an item. Naturally, I have seen lots of smoking going on in the movies, but I have also seen lots of other deplorable things take place in motion pictures, like murder, embezzlement, fraud, etc., perpetrated by the good guys. I won't describe the things that bad guys do. The point is the movies don't encourage people to go out and kill or rip other people off.

True, the movement that prompted this piece wants to put these movies out of the reach of young people in the theatres if they show smoking. But just about any movie has a bad guy, or someone doing something nefarious, including those we show to kids. Think back to some of the stuff you were allowed to watch when you were a kid. If you're in your late 50s like I am, you would have seen bad guys trying to do harm to Popeye or Bugs Bunny. And there were always Special Guest Villains ready to do harm to Batman and Robin with some dastardly means until Adam West employed his special Bat Get-Me-Out-Of-This-Mess device. I have never been prompted to do evil things to nice people. I have also never been prompted to dress up in colourful long underwear and go out to fight crime.

Besides, all this effort over the weekend could hope to accomplish is keep children from going to the theatres to see smoking. Those movies will soon be shown on TV, or be available on YouTube or a host of other vehicles on the internet.

Capitalizing on their fame, the makers of Batman came out with a quick motion picture in the summer of 1966. It was all the rage, but my parents refused to let me go and see it. It was on TV in a couple of years, so I saw it. So there!

It also stunk.

Some companies in the business of making motion pictures have already taken steps to get rid of tobacco use on the screen. It's their call, so I really have no business objecting.

But there is one part of it that bothers me.

Disney is one of the companies that doesn't show smoking. The last Disney film I saw was about two years ago, when Beth and I went to see Saving Mr. Banks, which was a biographic piece about P. L. Travers, who created Mary Poppins, with emphasis on Walt Disney's efforts to get her permission to make a movie about it. That means much of the story was set in the mid 1960s

One of the scenes in the film was set in a very crowded cocktail lounge, and there wasn't a trace of smoke in the air. I recall watching the film, remembering the period in which the story was set, and the word 'impossible' running through my head.

Now I know this movie was an exercise in story telling, as opposed to being a documentary. But it was a story based on what went

on the past, so a certain amount of accuracy is expected and would be appreciated.

It is a fact that many people smoked during that period of history. My father and one of my aunts were heavy smokers at the time (my dad eventually quit, yet died of complications from lung cancer, while my aunt never quit and lived well into her 90s). And owing to my line of work, accuracy is something that is rather important to me. A cocktail lounge in the '60s would have absolutely been filled with smoke. I don't see the problem with depicting that. It is, after all, reality

People should not smoke. There is ample scientific evidence that they shouldn't. As I stated above, I used to smoke. I received a cigar from a proud new father of twin boys almost 13 years ago, and that was the first tobacco I had consumed in about 10 years. It was also the last, at least so far.

But smoking is something that takes place in our society, although it is becoming less common than it once was. Indeed, I can think of one person in my immediate circle who still smokes, and I don't think this guy is a really heavy smoker.

It is an activity that goes on in our society, and has for many years. I hate the thought that people see the need to cover it up. This isn't Nineteen Eighty-Four and motion picture companies aren't the Ministry of Truth.

Incidentally, those of you familiar with that novel will recall Winston Smith smoked. Is someone about to censor that too?