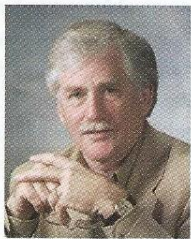


Violence Anyone?

written by Richard Corrigan



There has to come a time when the audience doesn't show up. When, if a movie or television show includes violent scenes, people refuse to buy a ticket or endorse an advertiser's product. It is all about the money, not the First Amendment. So, it is time to step up to the plate and say, get behind thee, violence.

I remember, during a vacation to Nantucket, a minister-friend announced he was going into town to rent a movie or two and asked what types of movies we liked. We responded with specific criteria: comedy, drama, adventure, but no graphic violence. He brought home *Full Metal Jacket* and *The Mission*. We suffered through *The Mission* with its unfathomed slaughter. But the first thirty minutes of *Full Metal Jacket* was too much to bear. We went to bed early. Here was a minister; how foolish was I to think that only peace and tranquility filled him. After that, I realized that the animal, the murderer, the psychopath, the Mr. Hyde is deep within us all. And it is our conscious effort to stay "civilized," for whatever reason, which prevents us from assault, murder, rape, and pillage.

So, does that mean our evolution through the ages is not evolution at all but deepened suppression? And the movies are a release of this pent up aggression—for without them, would we run wild in the streets killing and looting? Even the cartoons from years past depicted violence. In the classic *Road Runner* cartoon show, that is all there was—violence: smashing, hitting, bombing, crushing, and shooting. It was the format then, and it is now.

Because of the advent of television, more kids played with guns: the Lone Ranger's, Cisco Kid's, and Annie Oakley's. They even dressed up like those characters on Halloween with pistols loaded with the best quality caps money could buy. But you say, their grandparents were in WWI. And their parents were in WWII or the Korean War. And they lived under the threat of being drafted into the Vietnam war.

Frank McCourt, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Angela's Ashes*, at a recent talk at University of Southern Florida's St. Petersburg Bay campus said, "Teens want to be warriors. We don't have a war—not since Vietnam. The young men have to think of another avenue to get rid of the energy—testosterone."

The WWF (World Wrestling Federation) is a prime example of physical violence promotion. Look at a clip of any of the matches; the venue is packed. Of course, the word "match" assumes an athletic competition. The only competition in a WWF ring is which participant can fake pain the best. People actually pay to see the event. And they bring their children. In January, a 13-year-old boy was found guilty for, when he was 12, exercising professional wrestling moves on a 6-year-old girl. The girl died of a fractured skull, punctured liver, and internal bleeding. He saw the moves while watching WWF on cable.

In a January 2001 article in *USA Today*, Cheri and Glenn Sparks discuss the marketing of violence by the media, Hollywood and Television in particular, to youngsters. For over thirty-five years, academic research has been studying the impact of media violence on aggressive behavior. The Federal Trade Commission, in a report released on September 13, 2000 cited that 80% of the R-rated films studied were specifically targeted to children under the age of 17. One marketing plan for a violent, R-rated movie, stated, "find the elusive teen target audience and make sure everyone between the ages of 12 and 18 is exposed to the film."

ONE OF THE MOST PUZZLING ASPECTS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE IS THAT most people who watch movies on a regular basis demonstrate a general avoidance of explicit violence. And generally, R-rated films do not do as well as PG-13 films. Over the last seven years, the following movies appeared in the top five grossing movies: *Toy Story 2*, *There's Something About Mary*, *Liar, Liar*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Apollo 13*, *The Santa Clause*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

So why are there so many violent scenes? Robert McKee, famed teacher and lecturer on Story Structure, says that violence and high-tech scenes are not a substitute for good story telling. But the scenes are somewhat cheaper to produce and require less acting talent.

Do movie and media violence give you a better quality of life? Have you ever experienced a post-movie discussion where you've heard people say: I loved the violence; the violence made my day complete; I slept like a baby after all that violence. What if we chose a day and agreed that on that day, we would not show up at a movie theater. Let us say we chose September 3rd. We stay, that day, away from the violent-laden movie houses. Doing it would be the question.

Michael Crichton, the author of *Jurassic Park* and visionary of *ER*, has created a computer game by the name of *Joust* for kids. "I was very big on nonviolence," he states. "In the game, there is no blood or death."

Someone should invent a device that edits a movie as you watch it. You program into the DVD player that you don't want to see any homicide, murder, rape, animal abuse, child abuse, spouse abuse, suicide. You can choose the degree of sexual content. You can choose the language.

Additionally, what if, like at the SALT talks, the media moguls got together with each other and agreed to sign the Violent Acts and Vulgar Words Reduction Agreement. They could call it the VAVWRA. All would sign committing to, over the next five years, a reduction in the percentage of violent acts and vulgar words used in released films with the goal of permanently eliminating violence in the media - including news reports.

One of the most horrific disasters was the conflagration of the Hindenburg on May 6, 1937, just before landing in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Thirty-six people were killed. To anyone living during that time, hearing the broadcast on the radio has remained in his/her memory indelibly. No picture needed to be shown; the broadcaster's sobbing said it all.

The onus falls on each individual, not the industry, not government, not education but the individual parent, child, grandparent, teacher, athlete, politician, minister, the Boy Scout leader. ■