

## Generations

## To smoke or not to smoke on screen

Let me first say that I have never smoked other than once in a high school girls restroom when one of the cool girls handed me a lit cigarette. Sure, I coughed, everyone laughed, and it was probably the first time I realized that it would take more than a lit butt to lift me to cool-girl status.

Married to a smoker who has tried to quit numerous times in the 16 years we've been together, each time to no avail, I know the difficulty smokers encounter when trying to quit and compare it to my giving up food. I know that it isn't going to be a piece of cake, pardon the pun.

Smokers have been kicked out of just about every public place in the universe, but this column isn't about the evils of smoking or a pro/con stance.

It's about a PG-13-rated movie that Netflix sent me that had the warning, "Some smoking scenes."

I don't remember what the movie was about, who starred in it, or whether I liked it or not because I was too busy looking for the horrific smoking scenes.



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I'm positive the movie didn't have destructive, flesh-eating zombies, blood-sucking vampires, complicated spy plots where one forgets who the good guys are; hatchets swinging in the breeze; or shoot-'em-up drug runners because those genres aren't on my Netflix profile. I also know that there was no box to check on my profile that stated, "Please don't send me movies with some smoking scenes."

I guess the movie industry decided it was time to warn us all not to let the children sit with us or order them to cover their eyes when the star or co-star lit

a match.

But directors and producers are in a bit of a quandary about keeping the plot real, most notably James Cameron, director of the award-winning, PG-13 movie "Avatar."

One of his main characters, Dr. Grace Augustine, played by Sigourney Weaver, puffed away on cigarettes like a salty seaman. Cameron got a lot of heat. While he in no way promoted smoking, he did say to those who berated him: "Speaking as an artist, I don't believe in the dogmatic idea that no one in a movie should smoke. Movies should reflect reality. If it's OK for people to lie, cheat, steal and kill in PG-13 movies, why impose an inconsistent morality when it comes to smoking?"

This got me to thinking about our movie culture and how a cigarette dangling from the corner of a mouth was synonymous with certain characters

that became building blocks to today's American culture.

Take, for example, Humphrey Bogart fans who continue to enjoy "Casablanca" or "The Maltese Falcon." Replace the striking of a match and lit cigarette with opening a stick of gum and chewing into the camera and it just doesn't have the same punch.

Think about the Bogart-and-Bacall scenes in many of their movies where he tosses a box of matches at her and she gives him a sultry, come-hither look before lighting.

Throwing an apple at her and watching her take a bite may have been an alternative, but it wouldn't be memorable. Or would it?

Think also about one of the most famous posters ever created. It's still a hot item today, sold on his own website, some 60 years after his death.

It's of the enigmatic James

Dean walking down a lonely, rain-soaked city street with a cigarette dangling from his mouth. This generational icon became a symbol of restless youth, and removing the cigarette and replacing it with a lollipop would destroy part of our culture.

While I realize that Hollywood has a moral obligation to help encourage our children not to smoke, it also has a problem keeping the plot real if it eliminate smoking.

For instance, what are screenwriters going to do with their hero's or heroine's hands during tense action scenes, like one gangster talking to another? Peeling a grape or passing a Tic Tac just isn't going to work.

It's up to us as parents to put youngsters on the right track about smoking. Don't shoot the director.

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