

Absurdities point way to truth

IN SPITE of all our sophistication, there is a broad streak of the absurd right in the middle of much of our behavior, even at those points where we think we are being most serious.

I bring to your attention Robert Short's "The Parables of Peanut" for contemporary examples of our human absurdities.

In the first illustration, Charlie Brown, Linus and Schroeder are looking at a rifle with fixed bayonet. Linus says: "Gee, is that ever slick!"

In the second frame, Schroeder is holding the bayonet in attack position, making the proper facial contortions and obviously growling on the animalistic sound that the drill instructor teaches soldiers to make in a basic training bayonet drill.

In the concluding two frames of the strip, Linus, who was observing all of this, said to Charlie Brown, "Gee, I wish I had one of those... I'm always intrigued by educational toys!"

DO YOU consider this absurd? The real absurdity of Linus' comment, with all its inconsistency, is demonstrated by contemporary American culture. Our society features blood and violence on the television screen a hundred times a week, portrays acts of assault and killing in the most popular of movies, assures the distribution of hand guns to masses of its citizenry without restriction, and then is shocked by shooting and murder in the public high schools.

In our time, guns have become "educational toys" and killing a national sport. Even if police were



moral perspectives
Rabbi Irwin Groner

posted in every school corridor, the cycle of violence will continue unless we address its basic causes.

The second episode which struck me in Peanut describes a conversation between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy declares in the opening frame, "I want to talk to you, Charlie Brown..." As your sister's consulting psychiatrist, I must put the blame for her fears on you!

"On me?" exclaims Charlie Brown. "Yes," says Lucy, "on you. Each generation must be able to blame the previous generation for its problems... It doesn't solve anything, but it makes us all feel better."

ABSD? Perhaps. But consider how often our insights concerning the effect of the past on the present, whether psychological, sociological, economic or political, are used as an excuse to avoid confronting contemporary situations.

We blame our failures on our parents, who instilled in us complex and neuroses; we blame the cold war on political leaders no longer among the living; we blame the deficit on the prior

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— George Bernard Shaw

administration; we blame today's racial tensions on the aftermath of the Civil War.

No person will succeed in any enterprise until he takes responsibility for his choices and recognizes that upon the consequences of those choices his destiny will depend.

NO GENERATION in human history will succeed in solving its problems unless it similarly takes responsibility for finding and implementing meaningful solutions and thoughtful alternatives.

"People," wrote George Bernard Shaw, "are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them."

As we encounter the absurdities of life, we can discover the saving truths of human existence.

volunteers

Need for companions

Anyone interested in doing volunteer work, but not sure where his/her skills could best be used, should contact the Oakland County Volunteer Bureau, which has a list of volunteer opportunities from more than 200 agencies. Phone 642-7272.

IN-HOME COMPANION — Michigan Cancer Foundation needs many sensitive, caring volunteers, age 18 and up, to serve as home companions and help with activities of daily living, etc. Three hours a week, day or evening. Training. Phone 642-7272.

GALLERY ATTENDANT — Honest, courteous and helpful are the traits sought in a volunteer, over 18 years of age, to staff art gallery for Waterford Friends of the Arts. Will answer phone and questions from visitors, etc. Times are 1-4 p.m. Monday-Thursday, three weeks per month from October through

May. Phone 642-7272.

ASSISTANT REGISTRAR — Well-organized volunteer is sought by the Troy Museum Guild to assist with inventory of artifacts. No experience necessary. Times are 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. Guild also is looking for others with graphics or art background to assist in construction of exhibits and production of graphics for newsletter from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Phone 642-7272.

LEGAL RECEPTIONIST — Southfield Human Resources is seeking a volunteer who likes working with people and speaking on the phone to serve as legal aid program receptionist. Will check clients in, announce clients and have them fill out feedback sheet after appointment. Two hours, one Tuesday evening a month. Phone 642-7272.

Products in movies: hidden 'ads'

I've been noticing a lot of products in the movies recently. I thought they couldn't show product names like that?

What you're seeing in the movies is a new form of advertising called "product placement," which began in the late 1970s. Here's how product placement works: Manufacturers pay a retainer (usually beginning at \$25,000 and up yearly) to a product placement firm which reviews dozens of scripts yearly with the idea of highlighting one of their firms' clients, the manufacturer.

Frequently the packaging firm representatives will meet with film producers and writers and rework film scenes to include shots of their clients' products. The film company can then borrow "props" from the product packaging firm's extensive inventory.

Usually no money is exchanged between the manufacturer and the film company. Remember the grocery store scene in "The Big Chill"? Prominently displayed in the top of the grocery basket was a six pack of Coca-Cola.

IT'S NOT always successful, though. If the product scene ends up cut from the final film — usually the fee is returned. One product packaging firm describes its services this way:

"Because the movie-going audience walks into the theatre wanting to be entertained, they walk in with an open mind. Participating at their own discretion then, the audience views products associated with the entertainment openly and enthusiastically."

Sociologists state that this form of advertising is so powerful because most people don't think about



consumer mailbag
Terry Gibb

the fact that it is advertising. Viewer recall is also higher than you might think.

In 1982 when a movie audience was questioned upon leaving the theatre, the recall rates ran from 12 percent to 87 percent. Even 12 percent is a high number of people when you're talking about box office hits.

According to the Motion Picture Association of America, in August 1984, 36 percent of the nation's moviegoers were between 12 and 20 — while making up only 18 percent of the population.

Young people believe advertising and it can even become a role model for them. Consequently when a scene has been "worked" to make the product seem a "natural" part of the film, the audience may unconsciously link the product (whether it be soap, cigarettes, beer or even designer jeans as in "Back to the Future") with the star who they see using the product. You'll also notice the product is never used by the "bad guy" or in a disparaging way.

THESE PRODUCT placements regarding liquor

cause a second problem. With many films being sold to television — where liquor advertising is banned — scenes showing partial alcohol products are silently condoned to those watching.

In some cases products used in a film are credited — but usually at the end while the audience is leaving the theatre. Suggestions have been made to show what products paid to be in the film at the beginning of the film. Perhaps these credits would point out to the movie audience that these products are not the star's choice.

For addresses where you can write to express your opinion about product placement advertising, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Concern at the address below.

Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, 1025 Shelby, Detroit, MI 48226.

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EXHIBITION: Thursday, November 21, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Friday, November 22, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and one hour prior to each session.

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