

**Subject: Gratuitous Violence****Date:** Mon, 11 Feb 2002 10:30:24 -0800**From:** Ernie Crist <CristE@district.north-van.bc.ca>**To:** "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>**CC:** Mayor and Council - DNV <Council@district.north-van.bc.ca>, Directors Team <managecomm@district.north-van.bc.ca>

## A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

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I believe that the depiction of gratuitous violence on TV is one of the main contributors to violence in our society especially among our youth. What can you expect from youth, many of whom come from stressful surroundings and unstable homes, when they see people being pushed, kicked, punched, burnt, knifed, run over or shot routinely on a TV program which is also at the same time may be advertising Kellogg's breakfast cereal, a BMW or a cellular phone all of which may have a great appeal to those who watch?

I don't know what young people feel when they see such things right in front of their eyes but I can well imagine. If the adults on the screen can relieve their frustrations by kicking other people around or worse then why not me. This must be going through their minds if not consciously then subconsciously. And what is the result of this cultural barbarism courtesy of the corporate sponsors of such programs? Well, according to the experts, the results are devastating. Many people wonder why any society would allow its youth to be so abused. We are not talking about violence which is factual, documentary or otherwise depicts historical or news events but violence for its own sake.

Experts agree that gratuitous violence is extremely harmful. Young minds are especially vulnerable. To divert attention from its ill effects, the advertisers and sponsors of such programs camouflage their endeavor under the guise of freedom of choice and the right of the individual to learn from experience, etc. It has of course nothing to do with either one or the other but it has everything to do with making profit while putting people especially young people at risk. Gratuitous violence is insidious since its effects are not seen directly. According to statistics, the social costs of manipulating young people's minds is staggering. Increased crime, increased police and judiciary costs, loss of and damage to life and property, etc are but some of the manifestations.

According to many psychologists there is a strong correlation between being subjected to TV violence during childhood and the lack of social, cultural and economic achievements in later years. In summary, to compete successfully in the global economy in later years, children need to be free of having their minds filled with poison. Allowing children to be exposed to gratuitous TV violence will adversely affect the standard of living of a society.

In attempting to address this issue the Together against Violence Network, in a recently published pamphlet, made several important points. This

included the need for increased public awareness on the issues of violence, development of strategies to address violence, creation of or amendments to policies to effectively deal with the issue of violence and changes to an environment which it claimed will reduce the likelihood of violence.

The problem according to Together Against Violence is that for too many people violence is an ordinary way to be entertained. By the age of 18 our children have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 18,000 murders. " Together Against Violence" points to the medical profession's opinion on harmful effects of violence on children. It states that the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association and the American Center for Disease Control have reviewed media violence and agree that violent entertainment of children contributes to violent behavior.

However, the role of Together Against Violence is essentially to be an information clearing house only. Our role states a pamphlet put out by Together Against Violence is to encourage community mobilization on violence prevention. Once a year, it goes on to say, we ask the community to let us know what events they are organizing for the "November against violence" month and we provide a deadline for publishing. Once the community has given us their information, we publish a sheet listing community events. The Network itself does no planning, organizing, accepting or rejection of events. Events are the sole responsibility of community groups.


I believe that the time has come for Together against Violence to step beyond the information gathering concept and step into a pre-emptive action posture. In the US, a group of women forced the Mattel Toy Co. to give up its production of war toys. It was done by calling for a boycott of such toys. The Mattel Co. withdrew and stopped production of its war toys. In other words it was successful. I recently I made a motion on District Council that we organize a North Shore Symposium to discuss this matter. I suggested that we invite all concerned organizations including churches and youth organizations.

My motion failed as there was no support by the CCA endorsed District Council nor from any of the organizations including Together against Violence. The chair of Together against Violence came before Council to declare that collecting information and passing it on to relevant organizations is as far as it is willing to go. I believe this is no longer adequate. There is no evidence to suggest that, other than expressing horror at the consequences of gratuitous TV violence, this approach has achieved any meaningful response from either the television media or the advertisers and sponsors of gratuitous TV violence.

On the other hand, as a result of public pressure that went beyond simply informing the public that smoking was bad, the producers of tobacco products were eventually forced to curtail the advertising of tobacco which is harmful to public health. I believe the time has come to emulate this scenario when it comes to TV violence. Gratuitous violence is as harmful to the minds of youth as tobacco is to the body. Both are deadly in their effect albeit the manifestations are different.

Ernie Crist

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