

Hong Kong - a fog amidst the fug! by *Sung Ho Cheung, Foreign Correspondent*

My cautionary *Tale of Twp €^Tivities* is written especially for all sensible people; and cigar lovers too - wherever they may be.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times - because...

Heroine No. 1

picture the scene... SHC, sitting (as I usually do) in an open-air patio of about 12,000+ sq ft minding my own business havin' a puff. Across the way was an expensively attired Eurasian female (the boss), her inexpensively dressed Filipino maid (the servant) and a noisy infant (the innocent) - making enough of a row (read NOISE POLLUTION) to wake the dead - which is a bit rum given that there is a cemetery on the other side of the wall, the residents ensconced therein prefer the more usual - deathly quiet. Anyway, about 10 minutes into my puff, the boss(y) one makes a rapid beeline from about 30 yards away and canters straight past me to disappear briefly, then reappear with a child's pushchair rain/sun-screen attachment *sans* pushchair and proceeds to upset infant and servant girl by waving it menacingly - and for reasons best known to herself, in close proximity over their heads. A casual observer would be at a loss to find a reason for this peculiar behaviour? Next, the boss(y) female grabs infant and herds the servant girl in my general direction, and from about 15 yards away, she then shouts (*huh - at moi, Madame?*) - and I quote...

boss(y): "Excuse me sir..."

SHC: "*Erm, yes?*"

boss(y): "Would you mind putting out that cigarette?"

SHC: "*Aherm...*"

boss(y): "It's bad for my baby."

SHC: "*Actually, it's a cigar and not a cigarr-...*"

boss(y): "They're worse!" - muttered at the gallop heading for the nearest exit.

SHC: "*Madam, it's a cigar and NOT a cigarette; and sitting out here in the 'fresh' air is probably far more damaging to your infant than my cigar ... just check out the current air pollution index...*"

boss(y): emits a rather rude noise ... then silence.

Boss(y) and her entourage having now disappeared into the depths of the building, and me - left *in silencio* puffin' my segar, I mused: Hadrian's wall vs a harridan's wail ... hmhhh?

The point to my revealing that little episode... is to draw attention to the fact that Hong Kong - currently surrendering to a growing chemical pollutant-fed haze which provides some of the world's worst and most alarming pollution indices - and yet, such a person (presumably educated?) and living in a nice apartment block in a decent part of town (such as it is) can behave so irrationally and in such an illogical manner when confronted by my little robusto? The mind boggles and *Bolton Wand(er)ers*, as me Mammy used to say.

Heroine No. 2

Picture the scene... me and my infant son (safely strapped-) in our car, kerbside on a busy-ish road waiting for Mammy to get in after our family's visit to the Doctor. We had been there for less than 30 seconds when this Caucasian female aged mid-to-late 30's-40's sporting a wild hairdo and in need of sartorial elegance appeared, then began mouthing something incomprehensible and making strange gesticulations with her hand towards our car. We hadn't got a clue what she was about; and then - when it clicked she was mouthing "switch off", I looked at her and before I even had the chance to utter a syllable - she gave me the infamous 'finger' gesture, and then continued walking on her merry way - oblivious (to reality), and as if nothing had happened.

Now, in many cities around the world in which I have lived/visited - such outrageous and unmerited behaviour would often conclude in a speedy journey to the hospital or worse. However, in Hong Kong - we are a generally peace-loving and law abiding people, so we decided we'd *say a prayer for her instead* (as my dear ol' Da (R.I.P.) used to say), and so we set-off on our journey home.

Post Script: A little further down the road, this same person was seen berating a bus, with its engine "off" and devoid of passengers and driver, stationery at it's terminus ... much to the astonishment of those nearby; some of whom were seen to mouth another classic phraze (in Hong Kong) commonly employed when dealing with Caucasians *i.e.* "*chee-sin gwei lo*" (phonetic) which loosely translates as "crazy white (man)/person".

This begs the question: is ignorance bliss or is it simply stupidity masquerading as such? A tough question to answer, especially when confronted by ardent supporters of the anti-tobacco / anti-anything-'n-everything league. And as was revealed in the short tales above, such persons are now sprouting here in Hong Kong. However, it can not help be noted that they were both NOT of local native stock. I suppose in their own minds, they might justify their own uncouth behaviour as normal everyday pursuits as befitting two exemplary heroines of their peculiar persuasion(s).

And it doesn't help when... the government information service responsible for Health & Safety etc. is running a rather boring (and not very imaginative) advert on TV extolling the virtues of healthy living. The message is good but the delivery is jaded. During this commercial, a child 'character' is seen with a cuddly toy dog with a cigar in it's mouth (*brand - unknown, but it looks like a torpedo!*) and the next shot is the 'father' character who places a ***No (cigarette) Smoking*** sign in front of the 'daughter' character who then *shrieks* as all little girls are wont to do, and unceremoniously rips the half-smoked stogie from the poor mutt's chops and dumps it in the plastic shopping-bag lined bin. Cut to <family all sitting together - gawking, glued to the TV>

Consider this... the amount of chemicals they were portrayed as using (in the TV ad) to clean up their bug-infested home would be enough to clean up the spill from the Exxon Valdez - ***but that's OK***; and having a pooch sitting on a dining table sans underpants causes one to raise an eyebrow or two - ***but that's OK too it seems***; and how about the gawky looking 'family' going about their (supposedly) healthy lifestyle only to end up sitting down together, all glued to the TV set - ***enough said!***

It's no wonder so many people (in HK) are so ignorant and remain so, when such silly and ridiculous images are presented to impressionable minds coming from the T V set; when what they really want to see is a *fag-in-the-mouth gun-totin' triad-type character* doin' the cops and other adorable(?) gangster characters over whilst blazing away with their never-ending supply of bullets - tooled-up with the latest in chic machine gunnery ... now that is entertainment! And in Hong Kong, it is exactly this kind of imagery which is the stuff of life for fertile young teenage minds and others who should know better. *Figure that one out if you can?*

On a serious note... I personally (as a very concerned parent) am also silently outraged at the rising pollution levels in Hong Kong and elsewhere around our fragile planet.

However, ignoramuses believing they enjoy an infallible right to have a bash at cigar folk won't help clear the air any, and besides - it's a truly senseless and unproductive gambit. Furthermore, it 'aint the same thing as attacking the (commonly agreed) deplorable habit of cigarette smoking - which many people around the world bemoan as a greater evil, readily identified as the sole-destroying province of the poor, the uneducated and undereducated, and the ignorant. However, these niche groups (as viewed) from the perspective of the major cigarette companies (*y'all know who you are!*) are new & developing markets there for the taking, and only to be plundered at their whim.

Maybe one is being a bit cerebral here and taking the moral high-ground ... perhaps it's about time more of us did. The arguments for / against cigar enjoyment are well known and are continuously expressed in a variety of printed and electronic media by the very adult and (mostly) mature participants whom the anti-everything personages wish to rescue from their cigar-loving selves. If the above two examples are typical of the self-proclaimed anti-cigar saviours of *sheegar afishionados* all - I would suggest to all those self-appointed saviours that can read: remember this - cigar smokers have rights too!

Sensible solutions for difficult people...

1. If serious and truly unbiased tests were carried out by an independently funded scientific group/body/organisation (non-prejudicial to the interests of either the pro-tobacco lobby / anti-tobacco lobby) re cigar/pipe usage and the health risks/considerations for-and-against - users, abusers and non-users - the results of which to be made immediately and freely available to the masses *e.g.* disseminated via the net.
2. If cigar/pipe tobacco products could be defined and treated as a separate subgroup from cigarette tobacco under the (never-ending) tobacco argument, it might indeed highlight more clearly the concerns held dear by the *genuine few* and clearly answer some of those unresolved smoking issues. And maybe, once-and-for-all it might help to clear the mists / BS surrounding the real and apparent lack of up-to-date and correct information by (possibly) well-meaning anti-(cigarette)tobacco individuals?

No (cigarette) butts please - too simple? Too sensible? Oh well, if that be the case we'll just have to keep on puffin' along and continue to fight the good fight, secure in the knowledge that *it is a far, far better thing...*

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