

Commentary



Our Views

Local horror film hits the Silver Screen

By ROB GLIDDEN
STAFF WRITER

In addition to my journalism background, I also have a degree in Cinema Studies from New York University. This goes a long way towards explaining why I jump at stories like "The Clearing," an independent film which recently had a premiere at the Holiday Cinemas in Wallingford.

The movie is produced by Lauren "Ren" Knopf, who is also a language arts teacher at DePaolo Middle School. The movie ultimately became an opportunity for some of her students to learn about the filmmaking process. It is directed by Martin Abankwa and was shot during the summer of 2009.

DePaolo's staff and students were well-represented among the crowd that filled the theater that evening.

While working for the now defunct Hamden Chronicle newspaper in 2005, I had a similar story involving the local Tripeg Studios and their horror film, "Predator Island." The whole experience was hugely enjoyable.

The story of "The Clearing" was inspired by the enduring legend of Dudleytown, a long-abandoned settlement in the woods of Cornwall Bridge that is said to be haunted. Dudleytown is ripe for a feature film, and a Hollywood version has lan-

guished in development for decades. I never would have thought a tiny independent film like this would be the first to pay cinematic tribute to the area.

Of course, in the film, it's referred to as "Dudleyville" to avoid unwanted attention from Dark Entry Forest, Inc, the organization who owns the property and tries, to a cartoonish degree, to enforce a cone of silence around the area. They even tried to halt the publication of birdwatcher Robert Winkler's book "Going Wild," which featured a chapter about how he found an alternate way into Dudleytown.

Winkler found nothing out of the ordinary while visiting.

I can't help but speculate that their name may be hurting their cause. A name like "Dark Entry Forest" isn't going to add to the area's mystique? We might as well call it "The Evil Forest of Death Club."

Several community members and locations appear in the movie. One of the most fun moments in the screening was when the characters stopped for a quick meal at a diner, which was played by Erika's Restaurant. During this sequence, one character looks out the window and has a vision of a ghostly, bleeding figure while the plaza at the intersection of Queen Street and Loper Street sits in the background.

It was probably the scariest thing viewers had seen at that particular location, aside from the traffic.

In one of the previous stories I wrote about the movie, Knopf said she had her own middle-school students in mind while filming "The Clearing." This meant that the level of violence would be consistent with a PG-13 rating, though the film has not been formally rated by the MPAA.

As with "Paranormal Activity," last year's hugely successful independent horror film, restraint makes for better scares. The tense moments in "The Clearing" revolve around the threat of gruesome violence, not the actual violence.

It's a far cry from the "Saw" series, which I'm reluctant to classify as horror. They are more like extremely violent thrillers which, unfortunately, confuse being revolted with being truly frightened.

Even those movies have nothing on what's going on in France right now. The current wave of horror in that country has produced some jaw-droppingly gruesome films like "Inside" and "Martyrs." It's enough to make me look back in disbelief at my youthful days, when moral guardians got worked up over the comparatively tame antics of Freddy Krueger and Jason Vorhees.

I had a fun time watching the

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Rally behind the Relay

The Southington Relay for Life event recently kicked off its fundraising campaign.

The team of Mary DeCroce, Joyce McAloon and Rosemary Champagne, who also ran the Relay last year, are returning to guide the fundraiser for another year.

After 12 years in Southington, the Relay has raised over \$1 million for cancer research. Last year, the event raised \$185,000.

The theme of the 2010 Relay for Life is "Celebrate Life," and organizers have already planned several fundraisers to incorporate that theme and help raise money over the months leading to the event in June.

As we did last year, The Observer will run a list of the events so that the public can attend if they so choose. Each event had a great turnout last year, and this year, we expect more of the same.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancer is a group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. If this growth is not controlled, it can result in death.

Cancer does not discriminate and anyone can develop the disease.

The results of the report, "Cancer Facts & Figures 2009," located on the American Cancer Society's website, www.cancer.org, are, at once, uplifting and chilling.

According to the report, 1.5 million new cancer cases were expected last year. This estimate does not include noninvasive cancer, except for urinary bladder, and does not include basal and squamous cell skin cancers. More than one million cases of basal and squamous cell skin cancers are expected to be diagnosed this year.

About 565,650 Americans were expected to die of cancer last year. Cancer is the second cause of death in the United States.

It accounts for one of every four deaths.

Despite these grim statistics, there is hope. Survival rates are increasing.

According to the report, the five-year relative survival rate for all cancers diagnosed between 1996 and 2003 is 66 percent, up from 50 percent in 1975-77.

Also included in the report is a National Cancer Institute estimate that shows that approximately 10.8 million Americans, with a history of cancer, were alive in 2004.

The success rate is rising, just like the amount of support the Relay is receiving in Southington

Over the years the Relay has grown and Southington's is no exception. Despite a bad economy, Relay organizers have said last year was the best year for the event.

Relay organizers said there were over 60 teams set to participate in the event. Businesses all across Southington opened their doors to the teams and Relay organizers and allowed them to host fundraisers at their establishments.

Some businesses went as far as donating all the money they took in during a designated time to the Relay.

Beyond the participants, it is not surprising to see large crowds out supporting those walking around the track.

We would like to wrap up this editorial with a quote from relay volunteer Jamie Brennan.

"I am not a survivor, and neither are my parents, my sister, or my cousins," Brennan said. "I want to keep it that way."

Let us help out, however we can, to find a cure.

90s fashion: manhole covers for glasses

The other day I saw a photograph from the mid-1990s. It was a picture of me sitting on the couch with one of my daughters. She looked so young and cute, but I had trouble focusing on her because I couldn't stop staring at the huge glasses I was wearing.

They were so big, they looked like the goggles worn by World War I biplane pilots. I couldn't believe how goofy I looked with those oversized glasses.

Back in the '90s, I was sure those glasses were stylish. OK, we all know I have no aptitude for fashion (which might explain why, even after bailing out of engineering school halfway thru college, I've spent the last 30 years working with and around engineers, or as they're often called, graduates of the Dilbert Fashion Institute).

So don't take my word for it. I showed the photo to my wife, who does have good judgment regarding fashion (although apparently not good judgment regarding men). She agreed that back then, in the mid-90s, my glasses looked fine. The rest of my wardrobe, she noted, was, and remains, pretty awful.

But now, looking at that 15-year-old snapshot, she laughed even harder than I did.

Has there ever been an item that has gone out of style as fast as those huge glasses? I can only think of one thing that's even close. On January 1, 1980, the entire nation greeted a new decade by exclaiming in unison, "Omigod! What were we



Bill Dunn
Laugh or Death

thinking with those powder blue, polyester leisure suits and white shoes?!"

Thankfully, those hideous garments disappeared from society forever. (Except for a couple of reluctant regions of the country where you still can glimpse the occasional leisure suit, such as wedding receptions in rural Pennsylvania and the 3 p.m. Early Bird Buffet in suburban Orlando.)

But those "Fearless Fly" glasses? Wow, I still can't believe I wore those things for so many years.

It's gotten to the point where you can barely watch a movie that was made in the mid-90s anymore. When you're trying to pay attention, say, to what Harrison Ford's character is saying, you keep getting distracted by all the other actors who look like they're about to do some arc welding. The whole upper half of their heads are covered by spectacles with lenses about the same size as manhole covers—only heavier.

Now that tiny glasses are in style—including the ultra-trendy narrow rectangular model, which makes everyone who wears them, including women, look just like Keith Olbermann—you would think the prices would be lower. After all, one-quarter the material ought to be one-quarter the price, right?

No such luck. It's like buying name brand sneakers for toddlers. A pair of teeny little Nikes that can fit in your shirt pocket cost the same as a pair of size 13s worn by a college basketball player.

It's the same with glasses. Tiny little frames and lenses no bigger than your thumbnails still cost hundreds of dollars. And that's not counting the eye exam, where young Dr. Chuckles gets a kick out of prescribing bifocals for middle-aged geezers like me.

New glasses are so pricy nowadays, I've decided if my current frames break, I'm not buying new ones. I'll just dig out my old 1990s tortoise shell, horned-rimmed manhole covers and use them.

Yes, I realize people will laugh hysterically whenever they see me. (Except certain graduates of the Dilbert Fashion Institute, who will glance at me thru their own finger-smudged manhole covers and think nothing of it.) But overall, I guess I'd rather look like Bozo the Clown than Keith the Olbermann.

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