



## Guest Column: Magic of Mary Poppins enchants new generation

By *Stephen Gambescia* Times Guest Columnist -- Jan 3, 2019

I saw *Mary Poppins Returns* with my grandson. It was about the time of year I saw it as a kid, and when I was the same age as he. As for any baby boomer, the movie would be nostalgic recalling the magical and colorful scenes, snappy songs, and dancing.

For me, the original was even more remarkable. We went to a first-run theatre and on my birthday. I was at the age of reason, but was not pleased to see a movie about two kids in Edwardian London searching for a governess and some lady flying through the air holding an umbrella. To make it worse, it seemed like a gift of convenience, as my father took almost all of my siblings; given I was one of 16 children, we took up a full row in the theatre.

As is the case with parents, my father had wisdom, and he knew I would enjoy the movie, let alone it would be memorable for a lifetime. We each got a Sugar Daddy taffy – cost just a nickel – that would last close to the movie’s end. We were not disappointed by the show.

The next day we were off from school, given we went to Catholic school. What a treat to always have the day after your birthday off (8 December, the Immaculate Conception). We talked about the movie all morning and mimicked the singing and dancing. By the afternoon, we pushed the envelope. I don’t know who had the idea, but about five of us grabbed umbrellas out of the back kitchen and headed for the garage.

The big kids taught us how to scale the one story concrete structure with a flat tar roof. Over the years we heard our mother banging on the kitchen window warning the older siblings: “You kids get off of that roof; you are going to fall right through and break your coccyx and rupture your spleen.”

But we would not be denied. We got to the edge of the garage and found a good spot – just in case. We opened our umbrellas. We waited for no wind. On the count of three: jump! And then thump. We all hit the ground. The younger ones were about to cry, but the older ones were laughing. It was real; nothing magical about falling one flight to the ground.

When *Mary Poppins Returns* she is not the only one who flies through the air. This contemporary version has a legion of lamp lighters bunny hopping on bicycles through the streets of London. My grandson’s eyes lit up. These guys were so rad ...

The next morning after the show, he went to the basement where we keep a used bicycle. Our morning routine was the same. He rode his bicycle in circles in the street, as I walked the neighborhood alongside him. He suggested we go to a playground, which was a few years under his age appropriateness. He had other activities in mind ...

He carried his bicycle to the sliding board landing. He positioned his bike to shoot down a slide. I looked up before he went and said: "Be careful, you could break your coccyx and rupture your spleen." He replied: "Don't worry grandfather, lamp lighters don't have those." Off he went, as yet another young generation keeps the faith in the magic of Mary Poppins.

<p><b><i>Stephen F. Gambescia</i></b> is a Havertown resident and author of the book, "Every Child No Matter How Many is Special."</p>
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