

# RADNITZ

## He's the Talk of the Film Industry

(Catholic Press Features)

New York — Robert B. Radnitz, a boyish-looking 45-year-old film-maker who has often been hailed as the successor to Walt Disney, sat in his New York hotel suite reading the colorful parchment scroll he had just received from both the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures and the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches.

It was a "special award of merit" he had been given by the two church film groups in recognition of his "consistent effort to bring to the screen the best in children's literature, and for his production of distinguished films for children which also appeal to all ages."

Referred to was the steadily growing list of Radnitz-produced films that began with "A Dog of Flanders" in 1959 and has gone on to include "Misty," "Island of the Blue Dolphins," "And Now Miguel" and last year's "My Side of the Mountain," and which by next Christmas or Easter will include something called "The Little Ark."

Puffing on his long-stemmed pipe, Radnitz talked about the ideas that have made him the talk of the film industry and of groups like the Catholic and Protestant film offices.

"The films that I choose to make always have a simple story premise," Radnitz declared, "and allow me to do the following: 1. Tell a good story; 2. Show a part of the world with which most audiences are unfamiliar; 3. Educate. I repeat: educate."

He noted, for instance, that in his first film, "Dog of Flanders," "eight minutes of the film dealt with a painting lesson in which the youngster was taught to mix and grind color." In "And Now Miguel," a lengthy sequence showed audiences the sheep-shearing process. In "My Side of the Mountain," viewers received some pointers on wilderness survival.

"I hope that all my films contain the element I deem most

necessary in film, whether the film be for children or for adults—namely, the ability not merely to stimulate the imagination, but to stimulate it creatively."

Radnitz believes that one of the major mistakes in making films for children is "talking down" to them. "As is sometimes the case with contemporary children's literature," he said, "movies for children are often guilty of over-simplification."

"It is ridiculous to start out by saying, 'I will now make a picture for children.' You must make it for yourself. There is no necessity to talk down. I would hope that when children see my films, they are along with me, and if this is not the case, I would prefer to have them reach up."

Radnitz regards sadism and violence as much more objectionable in films although the sex content is what normally draws criticism.

"The violence bothers me more," he said, "and I'm fed up with those in our industry who blandly state that doctor so-and-so sees no relation between violence on the screen and the malaise of indifference and terror we witness throughout our land."

"I'm not saying that simply because a child sees murder and sadism on the screen he will necessarily go out and commit murder. But, when he is exposed to a continuous battering ram of mayhem, he must either go mad or become what is perhaps worse: indifferent. And that is what we are becoming today — the indifferent society."

Ironically, Radnitz is not very enthused about rating systems such as that now in effect at theaters cooperating with the Motion Picture Association of America.

"I have always been opposed to outside forces trying to tell me what I can and can't take my child to see. I think the classification system adopted by

the MPAA caused confusion to begin with, and the new 'GP' rating is causing even more confusion.

"I think that the cry that parents can't tell what kind of pictures their kids are going to, without a rating system, is just a cop-out. All they have to do is look at the newspaper ads. Nine times out of ten, those ads will give you a good idea of just what kind of film it is."

He favors more parents making a habit of seeing films with their children. "The average family today does very little together, and I feel the need for a modus of entertainment that the entire family can enjoy together, each on his own level. I would hope that when my films are finished — when it says The End — that this is not the end. That it is, in a sense, the beginning — that there are elements in it that the entire family can talk about, together."



Radnitz, children during shooting of film. (CPF Photo)

## 'God Is a Good Friend'

Catholic Press Features

New York—"God made all things and he tested them out and if they don't work He lets them become extinct like dinosaurs."

Perhaps Charles Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin may have phrased it in more precise terms, but this child's-eye-view of evolution is one of many thought-provoking and/or amusing "one-liners" about God in a new book titled God Is a Good Friend to Have."

Compiled by Eric Marshall and Stuart Hample, creators of the "Children's Letters to God" series, "God Is a Good Friend to Have" was greeted by "America's" reviewer as having "come closest, perhaps, to the best of this 'out of the mouth of babes' genre."

"There are phrases here that only a child could say nowadays so simply and bluntly," the reviewer said. "They stop you short and are worth a whole book of sermon or meditation outlines."

Questions were put to children by Marshall and Hample, and the written or recorded answers — 108 of them, including the title — were put into an elaborate \$3.50 production (complete with a case you slip the book in and out of), indicating perhaps that publisher Simon and Schuster feels the children's

comments about God are worth preserving.

"God is in every living thing but sometimes it's hard to believe it," remarked one child in the "Who Is He?" segment.

"God is there to talk to and tell things and help you if you'll never do it again," answered another.

Asked, "Where do you find Him?," one child nonchalantly replied, "God is everywhere, like the air. We breath Him in and out. He don't mind."

Some of the answers are not the most logical in the world (Q. "How do you know there is a God?" A. "There better be.") Some are rather mysterious ("God doesn't want you to see Him and know what He looks like, He's not scared or anything, but He's got reasons.") A few settle some long-standing puzzlements, like this one: "God made poisonous snakes so they would be careful not to bite each other."

Some of the children wonder how God puts up with his creatures: "God is always listening to everything. I bet He wishes He could turn it off sometimes."

To a question asking, "What does God want?," one youngster replied, "God wants peace and quiet, like my father."

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