

Sacramento Business Journal - March 17, 2008

<http://sacramento.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2008/03/17/editorial2.html>



Friday, March 14, 2008

Dead bodies, no leakage

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Joel Davis](#) Contributing Writer

Figured if busloads of grade school kids could handle the Bodies Revealed exhibit on Alta-Arden, so could I. Little nippers, who do they think they are out-stomaching me, the original field trip scam?

The controversial exhibit of sliced and diced bodies -- Chinese slaves, or golfers and violinists who smoked too much, you make the call -- tends to draw two extreme reactions.

"Fascinating. I am there!"

"Ewwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww. Gross. No way. I'll hurl!"

Being from the "ewwww" camp, my own bones rattled a bit when my dentist friend and masseuse friend -- both from the fascination camp -- offered to pay for my \$24 ticket. Yep, it's a spendy ducat to see so many lifeless performers. But, hey, the night janitor turnover must be expensive. I mean some of the intact bodies look like they know something about your past. I see a "South Park" episode with Kenny as one of the specimens.

The upshot: I got through it. I did not want to eat after, or have human contact for hours, or ever smoke anything again, but I got through it. I even kind of liked it. But not for the reasons you might think. I was more into the sociology of the moment, my companions' take on the physiology. While they examined the bodies, I examined the examiners.

"There's the nerve I deaden when I numb a patient," said the dentist. "There's the knots I take out of your back when I give you massage," observed the best pair of deep-tissue hands in the region. (No names -- she is booked and appointments are tough to get.)

I saw a few squeamish adults, some women who rightfully wondered why the exhibit was so male-oriented, but no squeamish kids. I therefore followed the kids. "I could outrun that guy," one confident fourth-grader noted when looking at the body posed as a sprinter. "Oooh, look, babies in bottles!" squealed a gaggle of girls when looking at fetuses suspended in orange fluid in, well, the Fetus Room.

The kids were fearless as they roamed from body part to body part, from nerve endings to the woman sliced in half that you see on the billboards advertising the show (yep, that's a woman; one thing you learn when the skin is off: take the pee-pees out of the equation and the male and female bodies are remarkably similar). "That is because they don't quite get yet that they, too, will die someday," the dentist, father of two young boys, observed.

"YOU MEAN I AM GOING TO DIE??" I shot back in sort-of mock horror. "Hopefully I won't end up here. If I do, promise me you will cover my privates."

I am not sure I would want to be immortalized like the specimens of the exhibit, especially the posed ones that somehow seem demeaned by the fact that visitors are led to believe that golfing, violin playing or training for the Beijing Olympics were their final acts. Maybe, but I somehow doubt it. It seemed kind of shameless.

I am happy to report I did not observe any leakage as had been reported at a similar show (apparently there are competing dead-body shows now; my dentist says the one in Chicago outmuscles Sacramento's. But, hey, Chi-town is, after all, the City of Big Shoulders).

My favorite exhibit did not involve bodies, though I did come away with the impression that the body is one complex machine and that the myriad diseased lungs might scare a few smokers straight.

No, my favorite was the commentary room, just off the souvenir room. On this day, the reactions of the grade-schoolers had me rolling. It reminded me of the comment board when I lived in college dorms (a stapled piece of gristled dorm bacon with the comment "I defy you to show me the nutritional value of this!" and signed Aaron Burr, hehe. At the Columbia University dorms, I went for the food, but I stayed for the commentary.)

Same deal at Bodies Revealed. "I see dead people," wrote one young commentator. "I want to touch a brain," penned another. "The guys were ugly -- we want sexy guys"... "We already knew guys had half a brain." "Well worth missing school for."

Especially if you are not going to die.

Joel Davis is a writer in Sacramento. Reach him through justicewaits.com.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.