

The Martian Who Broke My Heart

When I was 11 a Martian boy broke my heart.

Over Sunday breakfast I was telling my friend Sharon why I am so careful about the movies I see, the TV I watch and the books I read.

There was a time I thought I enjoyed “entertainment” that stirred deep, negative emotions. That was before I began to pay closer attention.

Our minds do not know the difference between pretend and reality. If a story is told well and we absorb it, *it's as if it happened to us or in front of us.*

Author Nicholas Sparks is on my list of “*Go back; it's a trap!*” Why read his books only to put myself in a position to have my heart broken? His formula is always the same—he uses his gift for storytelling to get me to fall in love with one of his characters and then, poof! HE KILLS THAT CHARACTER OFF!!

To me, reading Nicholas Sparks more than once is like getting back together with a guy who, every time you let him back into your life breaks up with you—the last time via text!

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice shame on me.

Nick, Nick, Nick, why use your powers for evil when you could do so much good?

I realize now that, when I spend concentrated time paying attention to things that make me squirm (and not in a good way) there is a price to pay. Not only am I twisted up while it's happening but I wake up in the middle of the night obsessively pondering it. And sometimes the negative impact lasts for years.



Which brings me to that heartbreaking Martian Boy. I was 11-years-old and watching, with my older siblings the sci-fi movie **Teenagers from Outer Space**. The Martians had landed and were, you know, being all friendly and nice to the Earthlings, winning their trust. One of the teenaged Martian boys even fell in love with an Earthling girl. It was a beautiful romance that fully captured my pre-adolescent heart.

Then the Martian Boy overheard his superiors plotting to take over the Earth. The plan was to leave in the Martian spaceship and drop a bomb that would annihilate everyone. This put the Martian boy into a panic. He had promised his girlfriend he would never leave her but, in order to foil the evil Martian plot, he had to be on that spaceship when it left.



Sobbing her heart out, begging him not to go, she watched helplessly as he boarded the spaceship. It took off and when it was far enough away, the Martian boy carried out his plan and blew up the spaceship killing everyone on board, including himself.

His girlfriend threw herself into the arms of her mother, crying hysterically.

As the movie ended, with dramatic music swelling, we heard the Martian boy's voice saying, *"I made you a promise I would never leave you, and I kept that promise."*

Remember, I was 11. I ran out of the living room, into my bedroom and threw myself on the bed. I cried nonstop for three hours and at dinner that night I was so distraught I could barely think straight.

Our minds do not know the difference between pretend and reality. If that silly movie had such a profound impact on me back then, imagine what watching the news does to me today.

Am I the exception? Am I some weird emotional mutant who needs to live in a protective bubble? I would argue not. I think the things to which we pay attention impact each of us on a deeper level than we even know.

While buttering my croissant, I said to Sharon, *"What I cannot understand is why people continue to do this. I know people who are aware they are depressed and that certain "entertainment" vehicles make it worse and yet they can't seem to stop."*

I said, *"If you burn your hand on a hot stove, you withdraw it immediately and you never do that again. But people "burn" their minds with movies and books and TV shows and yet they go back over and over again. Why?"*

And my brilliant friend answered, *"It's because they don't make the correlation. The hot stove is a quick and clear example of 'cause and effect.' What you're talking about doesn't happen as quickly and so it's not that clear-cut."*

Hmm....

- Have you ever been in a foul mood and couldn't figure out why?
- Have you ever been easily irritated when everything around you is going well?
- Have you ever exploded in anger when the pizza delivery person forgot the cheesy bread?

All these examples and more could be the result of something you'd been focused on that has deeply upset you. Maybe it wasn't today. Maybe it was a week ago. Maybe it was when you were 11!

Be careful what you feed your mind. **It matters more than you can imagine.**