

## A Bag of Trouble



By Morton Laitner

I'm standing on the Mall in the nation's capitol, staring in amazement at the Washington Monument, when I glance at a light pole securing a colorful advertisement. It reads, "See 'An Iconography of Contagion,' exhibit at the National Academy of Sciences."

I'm traveling with my youngest son, Blake, on his way back to university. I know these are the days he and I will never forget. Days that bond a father and son as tightly as memories glued into a photo album.

"Blake, how about being good to the old man, let's go study public health art and contagion at the Academy?"

"Sure Dad, I'd love to learn about contagious diseases," he sarcastically replied.

As we stroll across the National Mall, I grasp why my eyes focused on that colorful banner. Her silhouette was angelically framed in white, a sultry brunette wearing a red beret. As the traffic whizzed by, I realized the picture held my hidden passion for French women wearing red crepe hats and smelling of imitation Chanel No. 5, cheap

champagne and stale tobacco. This beauty's glossy full-colored red lips perfectly matched the red beret resting lazily on her head.

Blake comments, "Dad, there's another banner with that hooker on it."

"Son, thanks for pointing it out, I want to see what it says." I read out loud,

***"She may be...a bag of TROUBLE---SYPHILIS-GONNORHEA."***

I think short, sweet and to the point.

Blake exclaims, "Dad, that's gross!"

I explain, "Son, that's a World War II poster designed to keep American soldiers from procuring the services French prostitutes. To American GI's, Frenchie was a symbol of danger and death."

Blake studied the drawing and exclaimed, "What a mixed message!

They show a hot French babe and tell Army boys, who are about to risk their lives in battle, stay away because she "MAY" be a bag of trouble. Why didn't they have another poster with a condom on it saying, she is not a bag of trouble if you use one of these."

I laughed as I rested my hand on Blake's shoulder and said, "You know, back when you were born, condom posters were verboten."

Pausing I continued, "I remember how difficult it was in the 80's during the beginning of the AIDS crisis. How appalled state representatives were when we released condom posters. The image of Captain Condom injected fear in fun-loving Florida.

"Dad, are you suggesting health officials sometimes bow to the pressures of political correctness?", said Blake.

“Blake, there is a life lesson to be learned here. We who serve the people walk a fine line between protecting health and not offending the vox populi. I sighed, “That my son, is the real **BAG OF TROUBLE.**”