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"A Different Light"

A Different Light - 9 April 2022 - "I have mellowed out from my zero tolerance of be teased or harassed about the visual display of Cerebral Palsy"

You don't see many slaps these days, particularly a male slapping another male. But we sure did last week. In fact, millions did, as the Oscars were broadcast on TV worldwide and The Slap went on viral repeat via social media.

I have always thought of slapping as an antiquated symbol of outrage and a warning of further physical retribution. 'The Simpsons' brought this to light in a comical way in an episode in which Homer slaps the bar keeper, Mo with a glove, over an insult. Mo then gave him a free beer which was unheard of at the Simpsons' local. The cartoon then morphed into a musical parody of the song "Love Shack" by the B52's. Instead of the chorus 'Love Shack- Baby, Love Shack' the song morphed into "Glove slap, I don't take crap". We then saw Homer glove slapping a range of people from a toll booth operator to his doctor who was trying to inject him with a vaccine. The song ended when Homer slapped an older Texan in a cowboy hat responded with, "I accept your challenge to a duel, it will be six shooters at dawn." Homer instantly started whimpering in shock and fear.

As we all know, Will Smith slapped Chris Rock because of Rock's wisecrack about Smith's wife calling her GI Jane because she had a shaven head. Smith's actions have been controversial to say the least. There have been vast amounts of condemnation of such an act of violence. Assertions that people of Smith's stature and prominence should know better. That he is a role model. That he should have used the power of word and articulation to express his condemnation and outrage over the joke. That he should be charged with assault.

On the other hand, there has been widespread support for Smith, condoning the theatrical slap, saying they thought that chivalry was dead and it was great to see

a man standing up for his wife. Will Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, first started talking about her condition alopecia in 2018, when she said, "it was terrifying when clumps of hair started coming out in my hands. My hair was a big part of my life and that's when I started shaving it." Chris Rocks jibe that initiated the fracas was "Jada, I love you. G.I. Jane 2. Can't wait to see it." It was an obvious joke about her shaven head.

Personally, I know that when you have a very visual impairment or disability that you wear in public daily, there can be a bottom line which seems to switch on an outrage mode. These days I think I have mellowed out from my zero tolerance of be teased or harassed about the visual display of cerebral palsy. I guess in your late 50's as the extra pounds, decrepitness and baldness sets in, vanity is no longer a sport one holds dear to one's heart. However, growing up I had very low threshold for accepting any ridicule about my appearance and would seek revenge by any means or at any cost. At school this usually meant always having friends who had the stature and penchant for sheer aggression, who would dish out reprisals on my behalf. On reflection it was a heavy-handed measure as the initiators of the teasing were never that tough to start with. Insults or jibes about my Cerebral Palsy have even driven me to road rage. Charging after people in a vehicle. Again, upon reflection not the wisest of actions. It's the heat of the moment that makes one react in such a guttural way with a fierce drive to preserve one's mana. As one gets older the preservation of mana becomes more sophisticated and not reliant on a singular physical act of revenge. It's a more mature, more nuanced reaction that includes attributes such as 'rising above it', picking one's battles and 'not buying into it'. In short, a self-assured response to the slings and arrows from mindless fools that comes with age. How old is Will Smith again?

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.