

Price of cheating is too high

by Sandi Dolbee

Three bubbly little girls and a fun new Disney film.

Priceless?

Not exactly.

I stared down at the receipts. Tickets. Candy. Popcorn. Soda. Maybe the teenage clerk with the Clearasil complexion misunderstood me. I wanted to go to the movies, not buy the theater.

And now it's the summer blockbuster season. That means between pirates, ogres, superheroes, surfing penguins and a guy named Evan building an ark, chances are we'll be dying hard rather than living free (my apologies to Bruce Willis).

But wait.

Here comes that voice again. It's the one that whispers about saying your kid is 11 instead of 12, so he can eat for half-price. The one that nudges you to ask for a free cup for water and then fill it full of Pepsi instead.

Now it's telling you to sneak in your snacks to the theater.

You could save enough money to pay off your student loans. Or buy a tank of gas.

Tawra Kellam, the first lady of frugality, would love that idea, right?

"No," she says.

I caught Kellam, who runs LivingOnADime.com, at home performing a do-it-yourself painting job. After she

found the phone, she was unwavering in her resistance to being a sneak.

If the theater has a policy banning outside food and drink, then you either abide by that policy or you don't go, she says.

It's a business, not a charity, she explains. "This is the way these people make their money."

What about if you're bringing your own popcorn as a protest against price gouging?

"You can make your protest by not buying it," she replies.

There is no wiggle room, especially if you're trying to do double duty as a role model. Sneaking in snacks, fibbing about ages and so forth teaches your child that it's OK to steal and lie.

"I really think that if you're that hard up, you shouldn't be going to the movies anyway," Kellam adds.

She does offer some cost-saving tips for movie snackers. She and her family share a large popcorn and soda (I'm assuming separate straws are involved, though I didn't ask). What makes that an even better deal, she says, is that at the theater they go to, the large sizes are refillable.

You might also check ahead. For example, AMC Theatres does not have a policy that prohibits guests from bringing in snacks and drinks, according to Sun Dee Larson, a spokeswoman for the corporation.

If all else fails, you can always go a couple hours without eating. "What a concept," Kellam laughs.

Bottom line: If the theater says no to outside food or drink, then leave the smuggling to Captain Jack.

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