

# Not so Happy Meal

By Reg P. Wydeven  
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Becoming a father is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I am so blessed to have such healthy, smart and fun kids who I just adore. Plus, when McDonald's offers Star Wars toys with its Happy Meals, I don't look so strange ordering so many of them if my kids are with me.

2010 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 'Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back,' so to commemorate the event, McDonald's offered 8 new Star Wars toys with their Happy Meals. Even though we consumed our fair share of burgers, we failed to get the elusive Yoda toy. Oh well, there's always ebay.

My family shared many great laughs together while we shared ketchup for our fries. I treasure my memories of our tradition of running through the drive-thru after Saturday morning soccer games and racing home to check out what Star Wars toys we got.

Ken Yeager, however, does not share my love of the fast food kids' meal toy premium. Yeager is Santa Clara County Supervisor, and he has recently proposed a law to ban restaurants from handing out toys with their kids' meals.

In a shocking revelation, Yeager claims the restaurants use the toys to entice children to want their food. While I love Happy Meal toys, Yeager truly has my kids' best interests at heart. He believes America's childhood obesity problem can be linked to our consumption of fast food.

If passed, the law could either ban toy giveaways at restaurants in the county or allow toys only to be included with healthy meals. Opponents of the proposal cite the fact that fast food chains have improved choices over the years by now offering fruit slices, salads, juices and other healthy alternatives.

The rest of the nation will be keeping its eye on this county ordinance, for many of the healthy trends that originate in California are adopted throughout the country. This new law, however, would not be the first legal controversy affecting kids' meals. In fact, the genesis of the Happy Meal was spawned from a legal controversy.

In 1971, McDonald's began replacing its drive-ins with dine-in restaurants. At the same time it also unveiled McDondland, a magical place littered with thick shake volcanoes, apple pie trees, hamburger patches and Filet-O-Fish Lake. It also served as the home to Ronald McDonald and his friends Grimace, Hamburglar, the French Fry Guys, Mayor McCheese, Officer Big Mac, Captain Crook and the Professor.

The McDondland pitch was introduced by the ad agency Needham Harper & Steers to promote McDonalds' new Happy Meals. The agency originally hoped Sid and Marty Krofft, the creators of one of my sister's and my favorite Saturday morning TV shows, 'H.R. Pufnstuf', would agree to license their characters for commercials. When they could not come to terms, McDonald's proceeded with the McDondland promotion using puppets or costumed performers in the commercials very similar to those used on H.R. Pufnstuf.

In 1973, the Kroffts sued McDonald's, claiming McDondland was based entirely on their show, citing Mayor McCheese as a blatant ripoff of Mayor H.R. Pufnstuf. When the case finally settled in 1977, McDonald's paid over \$1,000,000 to the Kroffts in damages and McDondland phased out of the commercials, along with many of the original characters.

Since Captain Crook's departure (and also since they no longer include 3 cookies), my Happy Meals haven't been quite as happy. If they take away the toy, my meal might be downright sad.

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