

When Hollywood Loses its Sheen

The public disintegration of a television and film celebrity like Charlie Sheen is not only tragic and sad, but tragic and sad because it reflects the core sickness of an entertainment-saturated, celebrity-worshipping culture.

Sheen is as much or more a news item for his public rantings as he is for his acting. "But then again we all love a really good show."

This is what the late Neil Postman wrote about in his landmark work on communication, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Charlie Sheen has become a symbol of the title of that book and, tragically, a living lesson of what can happen to anyone who lives life without the God-ordained values that give meaning to life: faith, family, and self sacrifice.

Irene Dunne, perhaps "the greatest actress never to win an academy award" was the exact opposite of Charlie Sheen and thus the precise answer that we need to look to in entertainment today. Though few, except old movie buffs, know her name today this enormously gifted actress was as exceptional in a romantic comedy with Cary Grant in *The Awful Truth* as she was playing a Norwegian immigrant mother in the heart tugging *I Remember Mama*. She made the patriotic films like, *The White Cliffs of Dover* and moving dramatic portrayals of heroism like her film with Spencer Tracey, *A Guy Named Joe*. She gave an unforgettable performance in *Penny Serenade*, which is remembered as one of the greatest films ever made by George Stevens.

Yet here is the thing about Irene Dunne: around 1957, when her career was still climbing, she gave it up. She focused on her family, and she focused on her church and her country,

becoming a delegate to the United Nations, and a supporter of causes for cancer research, adoption, and conservative values that would help the poor. When asked how she could give it all up and just walk away from fame she responded, "Acting isn't everything. Living is."

The cure for Charlie Sheen is not more Charlie Sheen. The cure lies in less of him and more of God. The same could be said for the way we all use entertainment. If we find our lives consumed with it, on games, television, movies, the cult of celebrities, then entertainment, pardon the pun, loses its sheen. And we forget that entertainment isn't everything. Living is.

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