

**Wyoming Tribune Eagle, December 26, 2015: “Firms push sugar water” Casper Star Tribune of same date: “Drinking sugar causes harm”**

Recently I sent the book “Shiloh” to my ten-year-old grandson with a note, printed out for easy reading:

“This story is about Martin, a boy a few months older than you who loves a beagle and names him Shiloh. Trouble is, the dog belongs to someone else.

“The story takes place sometime ago. Martin collects cans and bottles to earn money toward purchasing Shiloh. Your dad used to collect bottles and cans during his college years, and he made money with it.”

After I sent off the package, I wondered why students no longer go after collecting jobs. Cans and bottles litter construction sites and roadsides but no one picks them up, except when a clean-up drive shames residents into being “good neighbors.” Why have these containers become worthless? Surely their production costs haven’t fallen?

The answer comes from Nutrition Action, the monthly newsletter of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Its November 2015 edition is devoted to the topic, “How Big Soda Pushes Sugar Water.”

Its investigation of the soda industry includes an interview with Marion Nestle, who is Paulette Goddard Professor in Nutrition and Public Health at New York University. She recently published her eighth book, entitled “Soda Politics: Taking on Big Soda.”

Here is what Professor Nestle says about the behind-the-scenes tactics of the beverage industry:

“Companies are fighting recycling laws and deposit laws for cans and bottles. What they fund is clean-ups . . . you do the work, and it doesn’t raise the price of soda.”

She explains that groups like Citizens Against Unfair Taxes sound like grassroots groups, but “they’re actually paid for by Coca-Cola and the American Beverage Association.” Advertisements suggest the beverage companies care for public health, yet “they’re sinking fortunes into defeating public health initiatives.”

A case in point is New York City Mayor Bloomberg’s soda-cap fight. Members of a group calling itself New Yorkers for Beverage Choice handed out cards, “Don’t let bureaucrats tell you what size beverage to buy.” Their website was maintained by a PR firm recruited by the American Beverage Association. Its hype framed the soda cap as a ban, which it isn’t. “You could buy as many 16-ounce sodas as you wanted,” explains Dr. Nestle. She adds, almost as afterthought: “My graduate assistant talked to people collecting signatures on petitions who said they were paid \$30 an hour.”

That’s a chunk of change, certainly more than students ever made collecting bottles and cans.

Sodas are “fabulously profitable,” says Dr. Nestle, especially the fountain drinks that cost nothing for bottles and cans. The drink in a movie theater for which “you just paid \$4.50” costs companies 2 cents an ounce. “That’s why theaters have concession stands.”

The water these companies use is free also. They get it “from tax-payer supported municipal water systems. It’s an absolutely brilliant strategy.”

Ditto with bottled water. “They run it through a filter but it’s no cleaner than tap water.”

The article includes a New York Health Department's campaign to fight obesity. "Are you pouring on the pounds?" the picture asks, showing four containers of soft drinks. "You're drinking 68 packets of sugar in just four drinks a day."

All that sugar causes a great deal of harm. The last ten years of Coca-Cola filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission lists obesity as "the first threat to Coca-Cola profits." Damage control strategies are paramount, since soda sales in the United States are "way down."

An innocuous-sounding group, the Global Energy Balance Network, is actually funded by Coca-Cola. Its message is that exercise, not diet, is the solution to obesity. Scientists of "considerable stature" have cranked out research favorable to industry, and "millions of dollars in research grants" came from Coca-Cola, which also paid for the Network's website. Naturally, when a New York Times reporter discovered and publicized the shenanigans, it resulted in a public relations "disaster" for the company.

Coca-Cola and like companies also market vitamin waters, sports drinks, and just water. These products appeal to educated, better-off socioeconomic groups, "but they're not as profitable," says Dr. Nestle. Hence, like cigarette companies, the beverage industry has taken its products overseas. Part of soda companies' efforts at marketing to people of color is recruiting athletes, often minorities, who are "role models, especially for young people."

There are sugary drinks "in drag," from frappuchino to cranberry "juice" cocktail to soy chocolate milk to "organic" honey tea. Fruit juice, too, packs loads of calories.

Still, "the most profitable product by far is flavored sugar water," Dr. Nestle asserts. "And the first thing you should do if you want to lose weight is to stop drinking sugary drinks."

Do my grandchildren consume these "liquid candy"? Do they throw cans out of moving vehicles or leave them behind in the ballpark? Do I ask?