

Being POLITE

For the past several years, my wife and I have been familiar faces at our local farmer's market in Richmond's Forest Hill Park—one of the most popular, most diverse and interesting markets in River Country. Stop by on a Saturday morning, spring through fall, and a sea of people, kids and dogs flows from end to end, along with live music from a local banjo or guitar player.

We buy fresh, free-range eggs from a particular local farmer there, and in an effort to contribute and recycle, we return the egg cartons when we've accumulated four or five. After returning the cartons to the same vendor over the last three years, we've never been thanked or shown any appreciation for this simple gesture on our part. We take our time to return the cartons that are of no value to us and give them to the farmer, for whom they *do* have value, so we figure a simple expression of appreciation is warranted.

Last Saturday, my wife decided it was time: she went alone to drop off the cartons, handed them to the older man, and waited. After a moment without any evidence of gratitude, she asked—"Does it help you when we bring these cartons back?"

"Oh, yes, definitely!" he said.

"Well, I just wondered—because you never say 'thank you,'" she replied.

Now my wife is one of the most polite people you'll ever meet, and she usually becomes extremely polite if there's even a hint of a clash—so in an effort to avoid being too confrontational, she didn't make eye contact and told him in a friendly way that she'd like a dozen eggs. Eggs in hand, she said, "Thank you so much!"

Was there a thank you, then, you ask?

Yes, there was. When she told me what happened, I thought. . .perhaps she taught this older man something his parents apparently never did.

When I think about it—and I've been thinking about it a lot for the last year or so since the political campaign has been raging—basic gestures of civility, respect and courtesy seem to be endangered behaviors these days. It prompted me to revisit an essay published in a collection titled, *A Better Man: True American Heroes Speak to Young Men On Love, Power, Pride and What It Really Means to Be a Man* (2009). The essay, "Civility", was written by Justice Harry Carrico, former Chief Justice of the Virginia Supreme Court, who recently passed away.

As editor Kelly Johnson wrote in her introduction to him, "According to Justice Carrico, this 'all but forgotten' term [civility], as he calls it, is the cornerstone of a good and just society. It is the thing without which we descend into an abyss

of vulgarity and self-satisfaction. Civility, which combines both grace and good manners, is an outward manifestation of the notion that, regardless of circumstance, we must continue to treat one another with respect."

In his essay, Justice Carrico includes a selection from *Rules of Civility*, which contains 110 precepts that George Washington copied into a notebook while still a teenager and kept with him all his life, guiding him in war and peace. They are as follows—

Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present.

Use no reproachful language against any one, neither curse nor revile.

Utter not base and frivolous things among grave and learn'd men, nor very difficult questions or subjects among the ignorant, or things hard to be believed.

Speak not injurious words neither in jest nor earnest; scoff at none although they give occasion.

Be not [obstinate] but friendly and courteous, the first to salute, hear, and answer. Be not pensive when it's time to converse.

All of us, including farmers and common men, but particularly politicians and statesmen, should take a cue from George Washington's words and remember that courtesy and good manners are simple concepts. Although sometimes difficult to maintain in challenging situations, we should always dig deep to recognize the humanity in our fellow man, and treat him or her with respect. . .And sometimes all it takes is a simple *thank you*.

We hope you have a blessed 2017 surrounded by your family and many very respectful people. *pl*



Editor/Publisher