

Danville News Column
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“The Incivility of Anonymity”
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Third graders pushed by moms to beautician birthday parties. Or where on TV, moms, thinking it cute, were dressing up their five year old daughters to become Vegas show girls. Fifth graders demanding cell phones. Kids who expect you to pay their speeding ticket. Dads offended when you scold their child for running up and down the aisle and bumping into little old ladies. Tantrums in the supermarket aisle because you won't buy Ring Dings – a ridiculous rant and rave until you cave (when mine, I'd sneak away and scoff loudly, “Gee, whose kid is that?”).

Are we raising self-absorbed, manipulative little egotists?

So, who's in charge at your house? God help the needy parent who needs their child's approval. God help the parent fearful of disciplining their child lest their child frown and become pouty, thus a terrible reflection on them, or, worse, won't like them. God help the parents who assume authority allows parental tyranny

How many of us are tired of being heartbroken by parents losing their kids to the world?

But then, why am I surprised? We live in a surly culture where trashy, salacious, innuendo filled books about political celebrities – lacking any facts, endnotes, footnotes, and based upon anonymity – likely will outsell scholarly and well-written biographies by real authors of merit and substance. Buy David McCullough. Ignore Joe McGinniss.

This cowardice of anonymity creates a cesspool of vulgarity, gossip, lies, back-biting, and malice. I'll look at anonymous notes sent me, but I refuse to give them any credence. Except when a legal right, no good comes from voicing opinions anonymously, hiding in the mob.

In 1775, Boston's census was 15,000 persons. That's less than the population of Montour County. You could wave 'hello' to John Adams. Philadelphia, in 1775 our largest city, boasted 30,000 persons. Down in Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe were neighbors. The population of Atlanta in 1860 was 10,000 persons. Now? 5 ½ million. If you divide earth's land mass by our current population of 7 billion inhabitants, you get 8.21 square miles for each of us. From the perspective of carrying capacity, that's not enough. What does happen when you dump a bunch of rats in a box?

It's easy to be anonymous today. We've sacrificed the virtue of the small. This explains why cities are infamous for rudeness. This also explains why most of our country's great authors came from small towns. They had the chance to experience what makes people tick.

No wonder the internet (occasionally useful) panders to our worst natures, and has incited more malice, lack of respect, falsehood, and social ill than anything else ever invented in human history.

No wonder we see an increase in bullying, especially among girls; these little princesses have been bullying their parents for years.

How can we expect our children to have manners when society has lost its? Even in the smallest villages or schools we are becoming more and more anonymous to each other. Hard to get away with being nasty or rude when we know each other by name. Intimacy means accountability. The dreaded words of my youth? "I'm going to call your parents."

A restaurant near Pittsburg received more applause than criticism for banning children under six years old from the restaurant. As the owner said, "*Although kids may be at the center of their parents' universe, they aren't at the center of everyone else's too.*"

The disease is: 'it is all about me.' The cure is: 'it's all about Thee.' Respect. Reverence. Connectedness. Known.

You see, I'm not sure if banning children from the restaurant treats the problem. Better would be to ban the parents from the restaurant and let the children dine.

Might we legislate a few other annoyances? How about parents who chat loudly on their cell phone during the whole meal, or those refuse to doff their baseball cap indoors, or those work the server to the bone, snap their fingers for more water, then leave miniscule tips?

Or ask any of our school teachers. They see better than most of us how many of our parents and children need so much help these days, good examples from whom to learn what it means to be a parent, what it means to truly love and be truly loved.

Why look to laws, legislations, or policies to solve our problems, from economics to schools handing out weekend meals? We need a change in attitude and aptitude. We require the small and personal.