

Danville News Column
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"What's the Matter With Kids Today?"
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They don't trust us. So said one of the kids I've tossed off the church steps for skateboarding. Well, just take a look at Memorial Park. Ever since they installed benches there, it's been a magnet for trouble-makers. Unruly boys. No self-respecting person would want to visit the park while they're hanging out there. Whoops. I'm quoting a newspaper article from 1910, a year after the Park was dedicated. Nothing new under the sun.

I admit ambivalence about this skateboard thing. We blame the kids for skateboarding on church property, but where can they play? Everywhere they go they are roused. What's the alternative? Retreat indoors, turn troglodyte playing video games? Sneak out and amuse themselves by smashing pumpkins? It doesn't help to force kids into corners. Yet, when should we speak up?

When was the last time you admonished someone for doing something wrong or rude? For using profanity in public? Asking someone to doff their cap? To stop texting during breakfast? Not scolding them. Instead, treating them the way you want them to treat you.

It's unlikely we'll return to those halcyon days when we use to have church clothes, school clothes, play clothes - but we need to counteract today's uncivil influences.

What is your pet peeve?

Girls gabbing during movies? Folks walking four abreast down the hallway? Bicyclists running traffic lights? Smokers flicking cigarette butts out car windows? Persons in restaurants talking on cell phones forcing you to listen to their private conversations? Then we're told it's none of our business. Well, it is. Because you're doing what you want to do, you make it my business. You want me to respect you, but you're not respecting those around you. It's more than pressing your rights; it's a matter of doing right.

This psyche of non-accountability needs consistent correction. We're all public property. The world doesn't owe us. We owe the world.

My daughter wants to read a book titled, How to be Audrey Hepburn in a Paris Hilton World. Given the way mass media normalizes behavior, is there a place for a David Niven in a world of Jerry Springers? Denzel Washington's in a world of Slim Thugs? Class or crass? Can't really get offended by some TV shows or movies. The comedians try so hard to be clever and scandalous when in fact they are pathetically boring.

Partial blame for today's lack of etiquette comes from how most kids rarely interact with adults. They aren't shown the boundaries by us. Maybe also we adults disagree over what should be the boundaries? How many coaches are worse sports than the kids on the field?

Or when they do interact with adults, the adults are either too timid to speak up or if they do it's the cranky old guy who sprays them with his garden hose.

I know what happens if you keep beating a dog and chasing it away: rejection and fear produces bared fangs.

Other blame goes to how we smother and control kids. Over-regulated. Over-watched. Over-structured. Over-protected. They can't even play with balls at lunchtime at the Middle School.

I tread barefoot through shards of broken glass. Girls define themselves by who they are with, guys by what they achieve. Guys especially need to prove themselves. Something, someone to be accountable for, which is why there is a direct correlation between maturity and chores. Guys take pride in their scars

Who cares if kids like their parents? I don't need my kid to be my bestest buddy. It's about them honoring you. You want to be honored, be honorable. You want them to respect you? Be respectable. You want to be trusted? Prove yourself trustworthy.

So far I've been admonishing the adults. But it does go both ways. A two way street. The principle and practice of mutuality. Kids: you want me to trust you? Then you

know what you need to do.

Richie and Robbie, rough and tumble neighbor boys, were always playing sports in their backyard and always getting into trouble. Their footballs, basketballs, volleyballs, soccer balls, baseballs - all sorts of balls - would fly into their neighbor's backyard and crash into his vegetable and flower gardens, breaking stems, squashing peppers.

Their neighbor could have punished them for the damage or yelled at them so they were too afraid to play outdoors. He could have called the cops on them or confiscated the balls. He could have timorously put up with it. What did he do? He helped them build a backstop.