

MY CUP OF TEA



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THIS JOURNAL is launched for the express purpose of providing a written forum wherein my personal opinions will be aired on any number of subjects. I welcome the opinions of others and with proper permission will publish their views in addition to my own. Absit Invidia.

Today's subject: Mutilated English

ONE of the most irritating, frustrating, and totally disgusting things to me is to hear someone with an annual income of millions speak such words as "I be, you know, cruisin' down de cote, you know, 'n dis man, you know, he stick a elbow rat t'wixt my ribs, nome sane? 'N den I hit de flow wid my win gon, you know. Hiss, you know, ruff out dere, man." What sort of language is this—it certainly is not proper English.

I find it an amazing fact that many students go through twelve years of schooling, receive their high school diplomas and are unable to speak the language they were taught. That brings up another amazing fact: some students are capable of reading complicated passages, which they fully understand and can write about intelligently, yet are unable to voice without slaughtering all the

rules of grammar and speech. How can this be? A sampling of possible causes may include these:

- Peer Influence
- Home Environment
- Defiant Attitude
- Speech Impediment

One child is likely to mimic another if they are friends. By the same token, one child is unlikely to criticize the speech of a friend, although he knows it is improper. Since youngsters will not correct each other, the solution lies elsewhere. One young person's good enunciation may well reinforce that of a friend, but such influence will be of a voluntary nature only.

It is unrealistic to believe that a child who is exposed to bad use of language at home will speak differently than those in his or her home environment. Just as unrealistic is to suppose that the family will learn to use good English by hearing it from the child. The solution is not here.

Unfortunately, too many of our young people are saturated with the bitter harangues of civil rights and the cries of injustice constantly voiced by those who make a career of uncovering both real and imagined instances of discrimination. Is it any wonder that such kids grow up defiant and rebellious toward everything taught in our schools today? Such defiant attitudes make a farce of any attempt to teach better use of our language.

In those cases where physical problems such as speech impediments adversely affect one's ability to communicate, therapy to correct the handicap is available.

Is it fair to put responsibility for the lack of good English usage at the feet of our educators? To some extent, yes.....maybe. Parents bear a lot of responsibility, also, and they have fallen short of meeting that responsibility too often. It is easy for a parent who is overwhelmed by the pressures of daily existence to rely totally on the teacher to prepare the children for life after school. Easy, yes, but totally wrong and not in the interest of the children. What do we do?

We need to put pride back in our language. The writers of past generations offer countless examples of the beauty of English. Not every language is so rich in choices of expression. Few are the languages which harbor so many unknown and unused words that are there for the taking. A few steps in the right direction might be:

- Emphasize appreciation of English along with good grammar.
- Instill pride in speaking properly.
- Practice more public speaking.
- Reward good diction in school.
- Promote debating meets.
- Teach conversation in class.

There are many paths to better use of our great language and what I have suggested here is that we take seriously the damage being done to it and to do something immediately before we lose it. Our schools, churches, civic organizations and fraternal groups can each play an important role in the reclamation of English. Nor should sports be lax in stressing the importance of good language. Abraham Lincoln expressed it this way: *"It is better to keep one's mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt."*

"A man cannot utter two or three sentences without disclosing to intelligent ears precisely where he stands in life and thought"

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The difference between the *almost right* word and the *right* word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

--Mark Twain

As amateur journalists, each of us has the opportunity to promote the use of good English. I plan to make use of my dictionary and to follow as best I can the rules of grammar. Will you?