

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Kids and a Food Fight....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Column deadlines often are near enough to nudge before first paragraphs are actually written.

Some might think such to be sheer procrastination. I prefer to consider my “delays” to be viewed as being more akin to prolonged research. Pretend that I am hacking through the vines of a word jungle with a machete, searching for just the right ones.

Ernest Hemingway considered it a good writing day if he turned out 500 words (think *Old Man and the Sea*), while Stephen King had goals of writing at least 2,000 words between sunrise and sunset

Heavens to Betsy, I’m not trying to compare my writing to these literary giants, but rather acknowledging great authors who “stayed at it,” no matter how much time was required. I make the same pledge, to “stay at it,” even if time is short and deadlines loom.

Before leaving recently on a five-day speaking trip to Florida, I prepared a draft of my next column. I wanted to return home to put finishing touches on column #1,132 with comparative ease.

Alas, I couldn’t find the draft, even prying into my computer’s deepest innards, finding zilch. There is the temptation to remember that speaking should always be an improvement over silence. This said, the printed word should always be preferable to a blank space. Editors, however, never approve of blankness, even when their faces suggest otherwise. So, I write, even if hurriedly, almost tearful that a draft is flying aimlessly about in cyber space. I do recall that it centered on a church youth minister and the luncheon setting on the final day at summer youth camp, shortly before he left youth ministry....

He will never forget an unexpected “food fight” waged by a bunch of youngsters chowing down in the dining hall, soon to board a couple of buses for the ride home. It’s just as well that this man of the cloth remains unnamed, since a mild epithet flew from his mouth--one that would hardly be noted in today’s culture even if uttered by the Pope.

Yet, it was strong for this man, whose previous typical utterances were squeaky clean. Okay, it was a four-letter word, but not one of the worst ones. Still, it shocked the youth, his wife, the camp director and a handful of parents, all of whom had been in prayerful mode earlier for the several life-changing spiritual decisions by several students during the weeklong outing.

He stood on a table to make what began as a one-word expression to “describe what the place looked like.” He spoke bravely at the height of a food fight, with splatterings of steak,

potatoes and buttered rolls flying by. (Okay, the expression was screamed, and the word began with “c,” and that’s the only clue I’ll provide. And don’t even think of asking me the name of the church.)....

The leader then bellowed out specific instructions. The kids were told to grab their towels that already were packed and ready for home washing machines. They were then to return to the dining hall for scrubbing of the painted concrete floors on “all fours.” Then, he joined them in a crawling mode, determining that another scrubbing session would be needed, followed also by a third. He didn’t want campers during the upcoming week to slip and slide due to his kids’ silliness.

Before a fourth scrub started, the camp director grabbed the microphone. “I appreciate your efforts,” he said. “But enough is enough. You’re rubbing the paint off the concrete.” (Addendum: Chris remains in ministry for ages, and for, uh, all ages.)

Finally, my initial piece had a remembrance of yet another preacher, the late Homer (Bud) Stephens, who twice annually made the same announcement at Easter services and Sundays nearest Christmas at his small rural church. “On the other 50 Sundays, we don’t have real flowers.”....

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to speak and write. The Idle American, begun in 2003, is one of the longest-running syndicated columns. Contact: 817-447-3872. Email: newbury@speakerdoc.com. Website: www.speakerdoc.com.