

A Reasoned Response

In response to a comment I recently made on Facebook about my not wanting any more soldiers to die for me, a stranger said something that really set me back a pace or two. He apparently mistook my opposition to war as disrespect for people serving in the Armed Forces. This is what he said, "If you ever say anything stupid like that around me I'll give you the beating your father never gave you." Nicely put; simple and to the point. Apparently my new pen pal believes that father-son beatings instill respect for the Armed Forces and the American way of life. I prefer education and mentoring but if beatings worked for him who am I to argue?

I would love to just let it go at that but his is the sort of "reasoning" that keeps the world in plentiful supply of bullies, thugs and abused children. It's interesting that just before he got to the beating me up part he said that "American G.I.s had indeed died to protect my right to say things, even stupid things." So, having carefully laid out that I have the right to say whatever I want, even when I'm wrong, he goes on to let me know that the penalty for speaking out is getting beat up. I think I detect a mixed message there. "Go ahead and say it, it's your right, then I'll beat you up". I wonder, did all those soldiers die to protect his right to hurt the people he disagrees with? I'm trying to remember where it is written, "If a man differs in thought from you then ye shall smack him around". Can anyone out there help me with that idea? Is it in the Constitution or in the legal code or in some sacred book? Did I miss that day in school?

I think that the actual source for the justification of abusive behavior is the abusive parent in the first place. It's a well known cycle. I hit you, you hit your kids and they hit their kids and so on and so on. As for whether a beating teaches anything, I have my doubts. Well, that's not exactly true. A beating might very well teach you to shut up when you are within arm's length of a beater and that's a valuable lesson. After all, once you have established that a fellow is of a mind to hit the people he's angry with, why would you want to hang around him at all? Is it the thrill of anticipating the next time he'll go off on someone? I'll pass, thanks. Lesson learned. Of course children don't have the luxury of avoiding a violent parent do they? That's the really sad aspect of an abusive environment. The kids and the spouse cower and take it and only the luckier ones find a way out.

It's just a small step to extend the 'Violence corrects behavior' approach to the people in your community with whom you heatedly disagree. But I certainly won't shut up simply because a thuggish practitioner has threatened me. In fact it's more important than ever for people to say what they think, to speak out rather than lash out. Public discourse in our era is dominated by the sound bite and pandering drivel. We are a people who seem to like their public figures to emulate the "Rambo" school of oratory. A grunt, a sneer, a scary smile followed by a burst of violent fury. Willful ignorance wrapped in smoldering anger play great in the movies but in real life they lead to wrecked families and generations doomed to more of the same hopeless cruelty.

So with all due respect to my would-be lesson giver, I'll take a pass on the beating and finish this column. In the meantime he might do well to consider some lessons for himself. Maybe he could start by stepping outside his angry little mind for a minute and consider the fact that his position leads to pain, fear and suffering which, to the victim, are satisfied all too often by revenge. Anger management therapy comes to mind; it works for athletes. A hobby might help; something about model ship building seems to calm the noisy spirit. Music has been known to soothe the savage beast. Ever since Ug sang to Og, instead of hitting her, music has proved a great tonic.

But try something. Almost anything is better than his original proposal.