

# GRAND TOUR

## *Bully Pulpit*

By Bruce W. Cook



As Thanksgiving 2007 approaches, in addition to counting blessings and reaching out to help others, I ask for one more thing. It's not really a thing. It's so much more. I ask for common good sense to prevail once again in the minds of people of goodwill.

In this age of growth and transition, somewhere on the path to electronic nirvana we've managed to lose

our grip on simple truths.

Here are a few examples from my personal lexicon of frustrations. I'll bet you can relate.

A friend of mine went into his local B of A branch (where he has banked for 30 plus years) and didn't remember a particular account number for a transaction. The teller said, "I need your account number." The man replied, "I don't know it." The teller answered, "I need your account number, sir," then yanked the computer monitor around to show him a blank screen. My friend was dumbfounded. "Can't you look up the account with my name and social security number?" he asked. He was asked again for the account number, so he turned around and left mumbling under his breath.

Yesterday the paper reported a crime in which a man stole a 52 cent donut from a store. He was confronted by a clerk who attempted to stop him from eating his stolen donut. In the process the man grabbed the clerk. He's now being charged with felony robbery and assault instead of petty theft. A maximum sentence for his crime is 30 years. We hear about similar absurd applications of justice over and over. Yes, there are always circumstances we don't know. However, if common sense prevailed the clerk might have simply asked the man to leave the store and not return, rather than get into a fight over a donut. Was he homeless, hungry, deranged, or just desperate? Thirty years in prison at the public's expense is indeed the pinnacle of lost common sense.

Have you tried to correct a billing error on a credit card? When was the last time you spoke to a man in India about a computer problem? Did your cable company install your lines properly, or are you getting signals from Radio Free Uganda coming over the Showtime Channel with no explanation or resolution in sight?

Then, last week I joined friends for an electric boat cruise on the Newport Harbor. The boat was docked in a rental slip behind a private residence on the water. Guests are requested to use one side path to the dock. One of the boaters went down the wrong path. The homeowner came out ready for a fight, and a simple mistake turned into a screaming match with enough four letter words to lead to a fist fight. Nothing was resolved. No apologies. Only frustration.

Perhaps you've had dealings with a government office, or

any institution for that matter, feeling insecure, confused, or angry over the experience. Was the cop who stopped you for sliding through the stop sign courteous and authoritative without being threatening or were you made to feel like you were a suspected terrorist on the run? Do you avoid shopping in department stores because (provided you can breath) the help is untrained and uncivilized with the attitude that the customer comes last and nail filing is a priority. "I'll be right with you."

You're not alone.

What's wrong with society? Why has common sense vanished from the planet? Along with common sense, common decency is also in short supply. They go hand in hand.

Take a deep breath and think about how you can add a little common sense and common courtesy back into your life and our world.

I'm practicing a few methods, all tried and true. Here's a Top 10 list in no particular order.

1. Approach any and all frustrating situations as calmly as possible. Screaming is destructive.
2. Think before speaking. Words are weapons.
3. If you're mad as hell about something, write down your feelings. Then, throw them away. Don't e-mail or snail mail angry thoughts.
4. Stay out of harm's way. Use your brain, avoid situations you know will compromise your stress level.
5. Make agreements in writing, hold up your end and expect the same from others.
6. Remember that the end only justifies the means if it is arrived at fairly, ethically and legally.
7. Short-cuts often short-circuit.
8. Avoid watching local TV news. If you want the weather report, go outside.
9. E-mail is great. The human voice is greater.
10. Mother Teresa is quoted as saying that she never practiced activism "against" anything—but rather was visibly active in "support" of matters, i.e. rather than being against violence, be in support of peace. Find ways to support positive goals and beneficial change. And, try to embrace an inclusive attitude or spirit rather than an exclusive point of view.

Some or perhaps all of these suggestions may contribute to a happy Thanksgiving. I hope so. All that really matters is that we take care of each other. The rest just fades away in the end. **GT**

*Bruce Cook is the creator of Grand Tour Magazine. He is a twice-weekly columnist for the Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot, and serves as Editor of the prestigious Bay Window Magazine. Cook is the host of "Inside Southern California"—a TV talk-format on Time Warner, and is an Emmy-nominated television writer and producer responsible for such programs as Entertainment Tonight.*