

Coping with Change in the Modern World

Have you fired up a Kindle yet? Or a Nook? Do you know what I'm talking about? Those are electronic readers, or "ereaders". I've given two as gifts, and they were well received. My California son has been ploughing through Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, which weighs about three pounds. He can hardly believe how light his Kindle is!

My Texas grandson, now at the University of Arkansas, got one when he graduated from high school, and could download some of his textbooks onto it, but I think he's mainly reading good library books.

An Indianapolis grandson also got one from his parents for Christmas, and that story is just short of miraculous. Here is a 7th grade boy, sharp kid but typical reluctant reader. It turns out that the Kindle is just the ticket for him and some of his classmates. They started out buying Amazon.com gift cards to feed their habit (buying ebooks) – so their parents were thrilled to find out that there IS a free lunch, with library books for the Kindle as well as all the other ereaders. The point is, these middle school boys are reading.

Many seniors got these devices as Christmas gifts from their adult children, and their reaction has been mixed. They are responding to the readability, light weight, and ease of use, once they are up and reading. However, one irate library patron just about stomped his foot as he said he was up to here in electronic stuff he couldn't figure out and didn't want anymore of it. (I didn't ask him if he was texting yet, because I could relate.)

Later that day, I was working out at the new fitness facility at Mill Race Center and noticed a woman trying to read a regular book while she was walking on the next treadmill over, struggling to multi-task with her left elbow and forearm holding down the pages and hanging on for dear life with her other hand. Now here is where an ereader would come in handy, although she could also have just tried downloading a free library audiobook. She must have been reading something really good.

So have I, just not on an ereader. Henry Alford's *Would it KILL YOU to Stop DOING THAT: a Modern Guide to Manners* is a great new nonfiction title on behaving oneself. Now, in an ideal society, nobody would need Miss Manners. They would learn these things from their parents and the people around them. America in the 21st century is far from an ideal society, manners-wise. Alford kind of walks us through current scenarios, and we come to the conclusion that maybe good manners are outward-directed, reflecting one's ability to take another person's point of view regardless of one's own.

He also addresses a current plague, the "No Problem" problem. No surprise. Whatever happened to "You're welcome", or "My pleasure"? Being thanked for giving a service certainly does not mean that the service-giver was inconvenienced enough for it to have caused him any problem, especially if it were done in an on-

the-job context.

Another cause he takes up is our heavy reliance on social media these days: email, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Apparently Americans are not terrific at making conversation with people we don't know well. Why is it easier on a computer than at a party? Maybe it's because we don't have to look them in the eye! Having dinner out last night, I saw a young couple in a nearby booth, each on their smart phones. What has a date come to? Whatever happened to looking deep into your loved one's eyes as you waited for the evening to develop? Think about it.

Once Upon a River, by Bonnie Jo Campbell, is a stunning contemporary fiction title that takes us up to Michigan, along the Stark River east of Kalamazoo. This is hillbilly noir again, which I am drawn to for some reason. The sixteen-year old heroine, Margo Crane, is unforgettable. She is not only a beauty, but also a dead shot with a rifle – two attributes which do not make her life any easier after the violent death of her father. She takes to the river in her grandfather's rowboat, with only a few supplies and a biography of her hero, Annie Oakley, in search of her mother. Needless to say, the river which was once her childhood paradise is a dangerous place for a young woman traveling alone. Her river odyssey through rural Michigan becomes a defining journey, and the fierce crosscurrents of character and place reflect the writing of a marvelous author, who is also a National Book Award finalist.

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