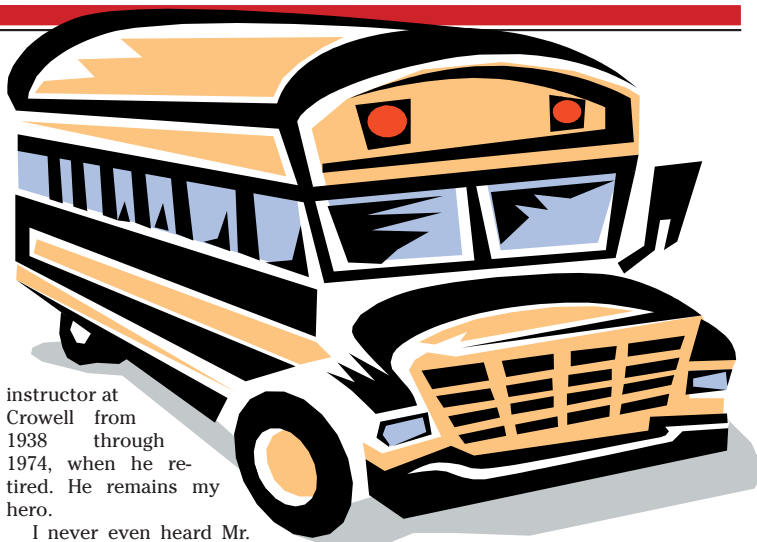


Good manners must never go out of style



FOR YOU TO CONSIDER

By J.T. SMITH
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A COUPLE of years ago, Crowell, Texas, School Superintendent Charles Hundley had me speak at the Opening Day ceremony of the school year.

I was a dab intimidated, since he is a renowned world-class speaker.

He assigned me the topic "Lessons learned" at Crowell High School, my alma mater.

From the time I stepped on Mr. E.C. King's school bus in 1957 until I graduated CHS in 1969 and went off to college, one of the lessons learned throughout at Crowell was good manners.

My first day as a first-grader, I decided to push my older sister, Gayle, aside to jump on Mr. King's bus ahead of her. I never made the top step.

He stopped me and explained that girls got on the bus first. When we got

to school, after the last girl had stepped off the bus, the boys could rise and proceed off.

I rode Ernest King's bus 11 of those 12 years, until he retired.

He led by example. One family had so many children they filled about half the bus with boys and girls from early grades through high school age. Mr. King said "Good morning" to each child by name every school day when they stepped on the bus. Every afternoon, he said goodbye — again to each by name — as they got off the bus.

It's an understatement to say I've "flown a lot" in 37 years at this job, from the East Coast to the West. But I still find myself waiting for the ladies to deplane before I get in the aisle. It's just automatic.

Just last summer, I rode a bright yellow school bus while on a tour in St. Charles, Ill., just outside Chicago. It took me back to 1957, when girls got on and off the bus first.

Beyond Mr. King's overwhelming influence on my life, my grade school principal, Mr. Gordon Erwin, was the epitome of good manners.

So was my agriculture teacher Mr. Marvin Myers, who was the legendary

instructor at Crowell from 1938 through 1974, when he retired. He remains my hero.

I never even heard Mr. Myers raise his voice in my four years of high school. He didn't need to do so — maybe in part because he stood 6 foot 6. But I think the major reason was he commanded respect. He showed us great respect as students, and we tried to give it back.

Mr. L.H. Wall set the same standard as both teacher and coach. He led by example — solid as a rock in character.

Roll forward to 2009

When not traveling, roughly half my phone calls in any office day are telemarketers, scam artists and an assortment of other slicks.

When I pick up the phone it goes something like this: "Speak to manager."

They don't identify themselves, from where they are calling or why.

When I tell them the national headquarters is outside Chicago and world headquarters in Sydney, Australia, and

they've reached Tuscola, Texas — a hamlet smaller than Crowell — the telemarketers simply hang up in my ear!

That's the thanks I get for trying to be polite and not hanging up in the telemarketer's ear. It seems to be accepted nowadays that it's OK to be rude; it's just a part of high-tech life.

The late Sam Walton taught Wal-Mart employees what a difference it made to be polite. I saw a staggering figure the other day of what a lifetime customer will spend at Wal-Mart.

Superintendent Hundley is forever "re-emphasizing" to adults — as well he should — to behave at basketball games (i.e., not giving referees "new" names).

You can be poor, middle class or wealthy.

Good manners are free — just as free now as in 1957.

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