

*Teen  
Etiquette  
with  
Feelings*

*Mary W Maxwell*





# Teen Etiquette with Feelings

How To Make Life Beautiful  
with Time-Tested Rules of  
Relationships

*Mary W Maxwell*

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Teen Etiquette with Feelings: How To Make Life Beautiful with Time-Tested Rules of Relationships

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*In honor of*

*Georgia, born 2021*

*Michael, born 2022*

*Elias, born 2018*

*Elisha, born 2020*

*and all the lovely members  
of their respective cohorts*

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## Preface

I am a happy camper. My life has been blessed with a good family, wonderful friends, and a made-in-heaven marriage. I want you to get charged up with happiness. Most of that sort of thing comes for free and is obtained by us from one another! And there most certainly are rules for making it happen.

Allow me to let you in on some of the old secrets, in this user-friendly handbook. Please don't worry about my age, or assume that I can't understand "where you're at." The old understand the young because they have been there. Yes, we know adolescence can be a time of torment, but there are many tricks to making it bearable.

Self-confidence comes from knowing what to do and what to say. You only need to get the basic rules down pat – all flows easily from there.

In looking back now on my mother, who died many years ago, I can't picture her experiencing a moment of social awkwardness. Mom was just naturally considerate of the needs of others and able to fix things up by words and warmth.

My late husband was more of a stickler for precise etiquette. He loved formality; in fact he is the main inspirer of this book. Through him I found out that the little extras raise the tenor of an occasion. Once every few weeks he would announce that he was cooking the dinner. Uh-oh. This meant I had to dress 'accordingly.' It also meant he would set the table with finery – such as by going out to the garden, snipping a couple of blossoms and putting them into a three-inch-high vase.

Undoubtedly we have lost some of the pleasures of life with the advent of 'technology.' Consider the habit of text-messaging. It is a great source of hurt feelings these days. I have been

mightily hurt, myself, when young visitors start texting away when they're in my home. Texting while visiting should be an absolute no-no (other than in emergency, of course).

I'll wager there are many pleasures you could re-establish, just by giving priority to human relationships, and not concentrating on 'the latest' technology.

## **Acknowledgments**

Many people helped me with this book. Ailsa gave me MJ Cohen's *Penguin Book of Quotations* that started me off on my Shakespeare toot. Rowena's love of poetry amplified that. Ruthie, who does crossword puzzles, and is therefore a walking thesaurus, engaged with me in hours of word-smithing.

Typists included Manal, when I lived in Canada, Simon, Claire, and Gayathri, when I lived in Australia, and Liz and Kerry when I lived in New Hampshire. Another young lady in New Hampshire, Ali -- nickname Xyla -- was a big help.

Melva, Petruchio, Kane, Danielle, and especially Angie, cast a proofreader's eye on the whole thing. Craig, Milly-Lilly and Em added artistic suggestions. I am so grateful to all of the above.

I have to express my main acknowledgment to The Almighty for letting me have the privilege of being able to write books at a time when many people in this world can only survive.

That leads me to say that it is my belief we could all, quite suddenly, change from being in a state of worry and negativity to being exuberant at the possibility of a better human atmosphere. Isn't it perfectly reasonable to say that we could help one another achieve the ordinary joys of life, just by taking the time to do so? Those joys are always there. Over hundreds of generations they do not change....

Try it today! Make someone happy! Show someone you care.



## **The Plays of Shakespeare, dated 1590-1612**

All's Well That Ends Well

Antony and Cleopatra

As You Like It

The Comedy of Errors

Coriolanus

Cymbeline

Hamlet

Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Henry VIII

Julius Caesar

King John, King Lear

Love's Labour's Lost

Macbeth

Measure for Measure

The Merry Wives of Windsor

The Merchant of Venice

A Midsummer's Night's Dream

Much Ado about Nothing

Othello

Pericles, Prince of Tyre

Richard II, Richard III

Romeo and Juliet

The Taming of the Shrew

The Tempest

Timon of Athens

Titus Andronicus

Troilus and Cressida

Twelfth Night

Two Gentlemen of Verona

The Winter's Tale

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## **A Word about “the Bard Bytes”**

William Shakespeare, known as “the bard,” lived in England from 1564 to 1616. His plays helped the English language end up in the form in which we recognize it today.

In this book, every chapter ends with a byte from the Bard. You may be surprised to see that a person four centuries ago had insights into human nature that have not lost their punch.

It might be worth memorizing a few of them, to be dispensed when needed.

Plenty more can be found at teen-friendly website: [shakespearewebsites.com](http://shakespearewebsites.com).

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## CHAPTER 1

### TO SLOUCH, TO SLUMP, TO SPRAWL

I asked a lovely, well-mannered 11-year-old to suggest a subject for a chapter in this book on etiquette. She said “slouching and slumping.” Right away I thought, “That’s wrong, posture is a matter of physical fitness, not etiquette.” Later, however, I realized she was right. Just as your verbal language is subject to etiquette, so too, is your body language. Perhaps even more so than verbal language

Pretend you are in the TV room at the school dorm, just you and your pal. Both of you are exhausted, so are sprawled over the sides of a couch in an unseemly manner. Are you in breach of etiquette? No, not for the moment, since there’s no one to offend. You and pal can't be offending each other since you are social equals, and also of course because you are *both* committing the act of ungainly posture.

Then a ‘nice person’ comes in. Let’s define *nice* in a circular manner as ‘the type who does feel offended at unseemly behavior.’ Now you are in breach of etiquette. I suggest that you can probably take care of this by issuing ‘a request for permission.’ Just say “We’re too tired to move. Is it all right with you if we slump?” There’s a 99.99% chance the person will say yes, in which case you are not offending.

Now pretend the school principal walks in. You’d hurriedly change your position, wouldn’t you? (In fact, etiquette says you should stand up to greet him, but that’s another story.) Why do you not want to slouch around him? Because we all instinctively know that you show deference to superiors by posture. In the military, soldiers stand at extreme attention when the commanding officer walks by.

(For more or less related reasons, all persons must stand while their national anthem is being played.)

The following are postural no-no's when you are in the presence of someone to whom you owe respect: slouching, slumping, sprawling, sitting with legs apart, sitting with legs crossed, and looking extremely relaxed and 'at home' when it is not your home. Needless to say, in a house of worship (of any faith), such positions are out of the question.

*Minding the Furniture*

Another thing must be said. You are not allowed, at a dining table or library table, to lean back in the chair so as to crack its wood. This is not so much a question of posture as of respect for communal property! Likewise, putting feet up on upholstered furniture diminishes the longevity of the furniture. It's bad enough when you put your feet on a sofa or chair at home; to do so when visiting is a real social blunder.

Egregiously an ass.

***Othello***, Act 2, Scene 2

## Chapter 2

### The Joy of Gratitude

You can never go wrong by giving too much thanks. I believe I have expressed my thanks sixteen times to the person who taught me how to cook rice in a wok. So far she hasn't said "Oh will you shut up about that." The fact is I feel so grateful for having learned this culinary trick that it just bursts out of me.

People love to be thanked. You can express it directly "Thank you." "Gee, thanks." "That was so nice of you," "I'm forever in your debt," etc. But it's just as good to let the person who gave you something know that you are enjoying it. "Kimberly, that camellia you gave me is still blooming in the kitchen window"; "Tom, I don't know what we would have done if we hadn't got all your hand-me-downs of sleds and bicycles."

Let's say your grand-aunt is paying for your music lessons. Does she want to receive a thank-you note from you every year? No. She wants hugs and smiles, to let her know that this favor she is doing for you creates a bond between you. She also wants to hear how you are doing. Give her a demo on the violin or tuba or whatever it is. Invite her to your recital. If you have any complaints about the lessons, I think it would be diplomatic for you to confide that in her, politely. Someone who is making a financial investment should be apprised of the returns.

In most other circumstances, however, if something is given to you that you do not like, it is not your duty to tell the giver. Quite the opposite; you should hide any criticism. Whoever gave you the gift made a thoughtful gesture, and -- as they say -- it's the thought that counts.



## *A Thank-you Is a Gift Itself*

Close your eyes for a minute and try to remember an occasion on which someone surprised you by thanking you. (Go on, please try this one.) Perhaps it was a teacher who said “I noticed that you helped that kindergarten child find her lunch box. Thank you.” Perhaps your roommate said “I appreciate that you didn’t stay out too late last night.”

It’s possible that you can’t think of any instances, because people really do tend to be stingy with thanks. If you do remember some, however, I bet they are ones that really pleased you. Note also that they are encouraging. Next time another kindergartener loses a lunchbox you’ll be motivated to do the right thing again since it was appreciated. Similarly, if your cousin goes to the trouble of sending you the photos he took at your party, and you bother to thank him, he is likely to send you photos again next time. If not, not.

I believe we all have an accounting book in our heads as to what we have given so-and-so and what we have done for so-and-so. Generally speaking, we expect a similar thing to be done for us later by that person, and then we can tick off that ‘debt’ in our mental book. But, surprisingly, a warm thank-you from the person also lets us cancel his debt. He has paid up merely by acknowledging our kindness.

## *The Thank-you Note*

Some gifts or kind acts call for a written acknowledgement. Trust me, your letter of thanks is worth more than the most effusive phone call. This is because the person can keep it forever, and because it shows that you humbly bowed in a way that could eventually become more public than a private phone call. (Thank-you letters, except in intimate circumstances,

are not privacy-protected: when you send one you *mean* to put the event on record.)

One day I was talking to my grandchild, age 8, telling her that there are four essential things you must do in a thank-you letter. You must describe the gift “Thank you for that marvellous crystal pendant.” You must also say how it will matter to you. “I’m going to be using that tennis racquet every Saturday” (or, if it’s a money gift “I’m putting half in my bank account and using the other half for a trip to the Rockies”), and you must turn attention to the giver by saying “It was so thoughtful of you to choose these items,” or “What good taste you have!”

Having told this to my grandchild, who paid no attention, I turned to another subject. Later, a 9-year girl who had been playing nearby said “Excuse me, you said there are four things we must do in a thank-you letter. What is the fourth?”

After I recovered from being flabbergasted -- just think, I had been holding her in suspense! -- I came up with the fourth. Personally, I consider it as important as the other three (describe gift, mention its use, and praise the giver). Here’s a hint, the fourth thing is a negative, a rule about what you *shouldn’t* include in your formal thank-you letter.

Any idea what you should omit? What if the sender of the letter said “and I want you to know that my brother Jim just lost his first tooth” -- is that okay? No, it is not. Remember, this letter is theoretically the permanent public record (even if it will be kept private forever in Aunt’s drawer), so any extraneous information would take away from its function. Just end the letter with “Again, thank you so much, Aunt Christine. Affectionately yours, Liz.”

Now for a list of the occasions on which a letter, rather than a phone call is required. You must send written thanks for wedding gifts, or for a party held in your honor. You should also

send a written thank-you in reply to someone's written letter of sympathy or congratulations to you. May you use a pre-printed thank-you card? Yes, but if you do it still needs to include some hand-written phrase by you; a signature alone is too cold.

As to the question "Have these rules gone out-of-date?" I personally do not think so. Still, some adjustment is possible; maybe a phone call is more appropriate. Just consult your feelings.

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child!

*King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 4

## Chapter 3

### It's My Sports Car and I'll Honk If I Want To

Have you got your driver's license yet? Be warned: there are a lot of rules of the road and they are not optional! The law covers most of what you can do and not do behind the wheel, so this chapter on etiquette (which is non-law) can be fairly short. Indeed you need remember only two words regarding road etiquette: *be considerate*.

Is honking considerate? Certainly, in one instance it is: when you need to alert another driver to something. But when it's used for harassment it is not OK, especially as it is bound to harass many people other than your intended victim.

I also believe it is wrong to toot the horn as a hello or a goodbye in a residential neighborhood. Even in daytime, hardworking people may be taking their much-needed nap. Isn't it mean for you to wake them?

#### *A Whole Town of Niceness*

Showing good manners on the road is usually connected with your behavior towards fellow drivers. A driver may ask your permission (via eye contact, replied to with a nod). You can recognize when he needs your help, such as when there is a long line of cars on the road and he is trying to get out of a parking lot. Safety permitting, it is considered 'good of you' to let him get in front of you.

I once lived in a small town where my secret delight in jay-walking was thwarted by the fact that all drivers came to a halt whenever a pedestrian looked like she wanted to cross the street. On my first day in that town I couldn't figure out what they were doing. I later realized that it was simply an unwritten rule (like

etiquette itself): -- stop and let the pedestrian cross. In fact, I've since been told that at least one whole state, Maine, follows that unwritten rule.

How did the tradition start? Maybe there were a few drivers who did it and others copied them. 'Peer pressure' moved in, and before long anyone who did *not* stop for pedestrians was made to feel like a deviant. Now that I think of it, the particular town in which I lived had a high level of courtesy and caring in areas other than pedestrian welfare. Shop clerks were genuinely warm, and door-knockers for charity were offered lemonade on a hot day.

This demonstrates, I believe, that mere social *expectation* of niceness brings it about. All humans are reluctant to break the norms of their group. So a norm of niceness constrains selfishness and sets a higher ideal. Yay!

The horn, the horn, the lusty horn  
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.

***Coriolanus***, Act 4, Scene 2

## Chapter 4

### Cultivating Your Warmth

Ever wonder why some people are so well-liked and admired? Is it because of their good looks, or because of their expense account? Maybe, but more likely it is because they have good manners and emanate warmth toward their fellow human beings. This chapter is about three lovely individuals who go well past the minimum requirements of etiquette.

#### *The Art of Gushing*

I have a woman friend, in Europe, let's call her Madeleine, who gushes. When I am dialing her phone number I get ready for the inevitable warm greeting "Dear Heart, how wonderful to hear from you!" When she bumps into friends on the street her eyes light up and she says "How are *you*, Yves and Paul?" and then she embraces them. I am certain she is genuinely pleased.

The art of gushing is suitable only for some people: those who do feel warm about their fellow human beings. It may be an inborn trait, but it is also an art that can be cultivated in someone who wants to do it but doesn't know how. The best way to do it would be to identify someone in your crowd who is like Madeleine, and imitate her or him.

Here are a few other things Madeleine is known for. She expresses a need for her friends. For a few months I lived next door to her in a high-rise. If I went away for a few days there would be a 'Welcome Home' sign on my door when I returned. She also remembers to fill me in on the news of others with whom we are mutually associated. She rejoices openly about foreign cultures and is sentimental about new babies.

Although Madeleine does not usually give gifts, she gives mementos. In my collection of things-I-don't-ever-intend-to-throw-out are three souvenirs of happy occasions that were thoughtfully created just for me by 'the gusher.' Were they wrapped? Yes, but not in typical gift-wrap paper. Madeleine uses colored cellophane or some recycled item, and into the bow she incorporates leaves from the garden.

Food at her house is 'presented.' A piece of pie is served on a gilt-edged plate (quite possibly bought at a second-hand shop) with a decorative cream or sauce. I don't know how she does it but she creates ceremony. Even Friday-evening drinks hour at her apartment has ritual and dignity. At Christmas time her home sparkles with a few well-placed special lights.

### *Perfection*

Speaking of Christmas decorations, I can offer you another role model, Caroline. Or 'Caroline La Perf' as I call her because she is perfect. This lady does not gush, either in tone of voice or body language (Hug? No way). She gushes in *form*. She puts gorgeous wreaths (made in her basement) on the door for numerous holidays, such as Thanksgiving. She manages to write elegant, acronym-free emails. (No 'lol'.) Caroline takes an interest in your goals and dreams, and lets you know that there is a friend to shore you up in times of sadness.

Ever have Sunday dinner at the home of a friend who puts out place cards, with your name done in calligraphy? It is a very uplifting experience and when Ms. La Perf does it, it all seems so natural. Her hospitality to overnight guests would be the envy of any great manor. If children are involved, she places a teddy bear on their beds. Breakfast is a memorable event. Excellent arrangements are made for local sightseeing. In short, Caroline is a welcoming person.

For the aspirant cultivator of warmth, even one who can't locate a Madeleine or a Caroline La Perf (though I bet you can), there's a mathematical method for getting your talent going. In a given week, try to follow the rules of etiquette to a 'T.' The next week do the same, but raise your enthusiastic input by about 10%. Later, another 10%, and so forth. Don't go beyond the point at which you would start to feel insincere.

### *Bearing*

I have another model to mention. Ling is a Chinese architect. I can't say he gushes, it's just that his manners are so fine. In fact they are so fine that I'm pretty sure I make a boob of myself all the time in his presence. Do I think this because he indicates it? Certainly not. Criticizing is absolutely off his menu.

Ling and his wife, and their teenage son, have what was once called 'bearing.' They also stand on principle and will do right by you. After my beloved husband died, they traveled a great distance to come to my home to pay respects. Each of them was dressed in black. I was overwhelmed by their thoughtfulness.

So even if gushing is not for you, you might consider 'bearing.' Ling, being Chinese, no doubt benefits from over two millennia of development of Confucian philosophy. This stresses etiquette, ritual, and personal restraint. It also stresses the maintenance of proper family relationships, as will be mentioned below in a chapter on siblings.

I count myself in nothing else so happy  
As in a soul remembering my good friends.

*Richard II*, Act 2, Scene 3



## Chapter 5

### Visiting a Nursing Home Resident

Elderly persons in a nursing home see their fellow elderly all around them and are delighted when a young person walks in. That's just a human instinct; we all like to be surrounded by a broad range of ages. So please know that a visit from you has automatic value: your young skin, your young prattle, even your young troubles will give some comfort to the old.

Is there etiquette for behavior in a nursing home, or senior citizens' centre? I think there is one cardinal rule, and it is a cinch to follow: *be yourself*. Do not adopt any airs of condescension, do not speak louder than usual, and do not assume that the patient has not got all his marbles. Just act like you do when you visit medium-age people.

My friend Ray had the care of his father for seven years following a stroke (the Dad could not speak and was bedridden). Ray told me that he always made it a point to tell his father the good and the bad things that were going on. Even if he, Ray, were depressed, he let Dad know. There was never a thought of re-interpreting the world as a fairyland.

We can't be sure if this was the best plan. After all, many old people do lose their marbles, and possibly, just possibly, they would rather hear about Fairyland than about the real world. But isn't it more respectful if you assume that they are still fully human and want the conversation around them to reflect reality as much as possible?

## *Etiquette of Terminology for Persons Who Are Disabled*

Not all residents of nursing homes are elderly. There are plenty of people who have been in car accidents or who have an illness such as cerebral palsy that render them unable to manage independent living. We who are lucky enough to be independent experience discomfort, naturally enough, when dealing with persons who are severely disabled.

Part of the discomfort comes from sympathy (or even guilt), leading one to wish to offer ‘condolence,’ or at least to express in some way the fact that we appreciate how difficult it all must be for them. In general, it is best to omit mentioning this, unless the person is your dear friend. Anyone coping with the life-changing event of a car accident does not really need to be reminded of his differences from you. I think it is better to concentrate on similarities.

Groups of disabled people have published some guidelines about terminology that indicate their wish to be seen as persons first, and disabled second. Thus, it is proper to say ‘a carpenter who is disabled’ not ‘a disabled carpenter.’ Also, the name of the impairment gets second billing. He is ‘a man with visual impairment.’ And don’t make a noun out of it. Describe her as ‘a lady with paraplegia’ (loss of the use of legs) or ‘with quadriplegia’ (all four limbs) rather than referring to her as ‘a paraplegic.’ Say “He has epilepsy,” or perhaps “He’s epileptic” rather than “He is an epileptic.”

The point is to avoid labelling, as this causes you to think that ‘the disabled’ are a special group. There is no such group as ‘the disabled.’ Nor is there a group that could logically be called ‘the blind:’ there are only individual people who happen to be unable to see. Referring to such people as ‘victims’ of this or that disorder is also considered too negative.

*People Who Talk Funny*

Extra effort on your part is needed when you encounter someone whose speech sounds peculiar. It may be that he was born deaf, or has had a stroke, or a tracheotomy, or something else. It is virtually automatic for us to equate odd speech with mental disability. But in fact one's general intellectual faculties are separate from one's ability to form words. A young cousin of mine who speaks in a flat voice following a stroke, and is also in a wheelchair, says it is very hurtful for her when strangers assume she is intellectually deficient. (In fact, the person in question is top of the crop intellectually.)

If the speaker happens to stutter, good manners require that you do not display any impatience. However, it is acceptable for you to supply a word if he is struggling with it. Note, however, that the cause of stuttering is often a lack of feedback in the brain: the person cannot hear the sound he has just made and may even be unaware that he has made it six times in a row.

Give me my robe. Put on my crown;  
I have Immortal longings in me.

*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 5, Scene 2

## Chapter 6

### Pet Control

Etiquette for pet owners: be considerate of the many persons who do not warm to animals. Never say to someone who is visibly terrified of your dog “Don’t worry, he won’t bite, he’s only being friendly.” This will *not* lessen their fear and it will make them wonder how you can be so dense.

Etiquette for non-owners of pets: be considerate of the many persons who truly love their pet like a family member. Don’t make any disparaging remarks!

The above rules are based on the fact of life that two parties can have quite different reactions to the same thing, and that etiquette requires that each party be aware of the other party’s feelings. Thus, if a fellow dog lover is visiting your home you can be more relaxed. But if a person who has never kept a pet comes visiting, you *must* be on the alert as to how your pets are affecting him.

If a family brings a baby with them, you should lock your dog in another room, or outside. Mothers of infants are very uptight about safety, and it will not do for you to explain that your dog is a professional child-minder, or that he has no teeth, or that you will ‘put him out at the first sign of trouble.’ (Growling, by the way, is a sign of *serious* trouble.) Good manners require that you not subject the visiting parent to any concern about your dog.

The guest, in turn, should express thanks in a way that shows respect for your dog. Personally, I’d say “It was really thoughtful of you to put Killer outside. I’m sure he would not have harmed Melissa but it saved me from having to hover over her during the party.”

Another possible problem is allergies. Your guest might

say “I’m allergic to cats.” Even if you suspect that this is a cover for “I loathe cats,” you have to oblige. By the way, this always means that *you* pick up the cat and put it where it can’t cause trouble; don’t just say “Puss-puss, I want you to go outside, go on now!” Maybe Puss-puss will obey but a little while later, when she comes back in, you may not notice her until your allergic friend starts to have an asthma attack.

Finally, as pet owner, you have to display excellent rules of hygiene when visitors are about, even if you choose to breach those rules in private. No guest should ever be led to believe that he is eating off the same plate that your dog uses. (Thus, when the guest has abandoned some of his roast beef do not put his plate on the floor and call Fido to finish it). It would be better to serve paper plates to guests than to compromise their health. As for certain ‘odors,’ give the house a good airing in advance. Put the (clean) cat’s litter tray as far out of sight as is possible.

[Stage directions:] *Exit, pursued by a bear.*

*The Winter’s Tale*, Act 3, Scene 3

## Chapter 7

### When in Rome, Use Chopsticks

We live in a globalized, multicultural world and people from many ethnic groups have changed their location. If you are North American you very likely have a relative, a friend, or a co-worker who is South American, Eastern European, or Asian. The etiquette that is relevant to inter-cultural contacts is: be respectful of other people's ways and also show an interest.

One way to show both respect and interest is to learn at least a couple of phrases in the foreign language of your friend. People often register great pleasure when you do this. Another way is to go to the trouble of cooking something familiar to them if you invite them to dinner. You may not get it exactly right, but it is the thought that counts and it will count a lot.

Also, ask them to tell you about their native land. Take out a library book on the subject, to stimulate your interest. Learn a song from them and sing it with them! This will make your world more warm and vibrant.

Of course the original expression about following the local custom is: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." If you go travelling you should try to fit in with other people's customs, or at least not imply that yours are the only correct ones. Naturally there is no possibility of everyone's learning everyone else's ways. Here are a few examples I have heard about or encountered personally.

- In Arab countries, you must not sit with legs outstretched in such a way that the soles of your shoes are seen by the person opposite you, as this insults them.
- In Australia, when an Aboriginal person dies, his name must not be uttered for a few days. Thus, a newspaper

notice of his death can identify him by describing him but not by naming him.

- In Japan, if you want to motion for people to come closer to you, do not use the Western gesture of beckoning with the hand. Japanese use that only to call animals.
- In Greece, and among the Greek diaspora, the holiday of Easter is more important than Christmas. It is a time for family to be together and to eat many special foods. Yet it is not celebrated on the same date as the Easter of the Western calendar!

When travelling outside your country, do not assume that it is all right to photograph local people without their permission. For some, such as women in Muslim societies, this would be a dreadful incursion. (Note: sometimes you are expected to offer money to persons whom you photograph.)

In a restaurant in France, it would be considered gauche if you order beef ‘well-done.’ The chef wants to practice his art and you would be asking him not to practice it (since according to him, beef should not go past the pink, or medium, stage).

If you are American you can go ahead and sit with the soles of your shoes facing out, while beckoning a friend with your hand and at the same time ordering chateaubriand well-done. It’s fine at home. But abroad you should do what the Romans do, or, in this case, what the Arabs, the Japanese, and the French do. Finally, note that the phrase ‘When in Rome’ can apply very close to home. Interpreted broadly it simply means: imitate your host. If you are staying overnight at the Smiths,’ and their bedtime is different from yours, try to go with the flow. If it is not possible, be sure to make a remark indicating that you, not they, are the deviant. After all, you are.

Away with him, away with him. He speaks Latin!

*Henry VI*, Pt 1, Act 4, Scene 7

## Chapter 8

### I Hope You Can Forgive Me

An apology is a wonderful thing. It makes the pain go away. Please close your eyes and think of a time when someone apologized to you and it really made you feel that the misdeed was nullified. (Do spend a moment searching your brain; I'm sure you have had such an experience.) Then, you were able to like that person again, right?

If ever there were a movie that teaches empathy, it's the film "Way Home," by director Lee Jeong-hyang. A little boy from the city is left in the care of his deaf grandmother, in a rural mountain. He demands to be fed "Kentucky Fried chicken" which she doesn't understand. You would be amazed to see how meanly he treats this dear, kind person. (It is available on DVD and should be shown in every school today!)

The great bit is at the end when the child realizes he has been hurtful and gestures in sign language "I'm sorry." *Note: It's never too late to apologize.*

#### *Offer To Fix It*

Etiquette says you should apologize for small things (even minutia, like bumping lightly into someone's cart in the supermarket) and large things. Etiquette also says you should apologize and offer to make good if the situation calls for it. "I'm sorry I spilled paint on your jacket. Let me take it to be cleaned," or "I'm sorry I forgot to attend to your flute class last week, but I shall pay you for it anyway."

Probably in a moment of startle the person receiving your offer will say "Oh, you needn't do that." Try at least one more



comeback “But it doesn’t seem fair -- that jacket is ruined.” Or “It’s only right that I pay because you set aside your time for me.” This confirms that you really do understand that you owe them something, and this acknowledgment may well satisfy them even more than the proffered compensation.

### *Do It Now*

Above, I asked you to think of a time when someone apologized to you and thereby made you happy or relieved. I could have asked you instead to close your eyes and think of a currently festering sore, an issue about which you feel that a friend or relative owes you a big apology but none has been forthcoming. We all have such unhealed wounds in our life.

This could apply in reverse. There is probably someone out there who would give anything to hear you say ‘*mea culpa*’ (Latin for ‘my fault’). Why not close your eyes now, identify the potential recipient of your apology, and rehearse how to say it.

“You know, there’s something I’ve been wanting to apologize to you for but I’ve never found the opportunity...”

The quality of mercy is not strain’d,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath.

*The Merchant of Venice*, Act 4, Scene 1

## Chapter 9

### Dating

A date is time which two people, who like each other, spend together. It may consist of sitting on a park bench or going to the theatre, or some public event. With any couple there is always the possibility of falling in love, but this chapter is not about ‘magnetic attraction.’ It is only about the earliest stage of a potential or tentative romance.

#### *A First Date*

Teenagers may worry about their first date. In particular they may worry about how to broach an invitation. Clearly it can be traumatic if one person comes right out and says “Will you date me?” because the other person may simply say “No.” This problem can easily be avoided by a more subtle build-up. One might ask “Do you like science fiction movies?” or “Have you ever been to the La-Something-or-Other Pizzeria?” Should the person reply “No,” there is no reason to feel attacked. In fact, he or she may not have even realized you were looking for an opening wedge. You will probably be able to pick up signals to confirm this. In any case, you can wait a while and attempt a different approach later.

Once an agreement to go on a first date takes place, there is still fear on both sides. One concern may be ‘How will I know when to say goodnight?’ Thus it is probably best to have the first date be an event which has an obvious beginning and end. Dinner at a restaurant fills this requirement, as does a movie.

A simpler date, and one to which you can invite the person spontaneously instead of three weeks in advance, is a walk to a particular destination, “Wanna accompany me to the

library?” or “Will you wait with me at the bus stop?” Ten minutes’ worth of chatter later, the ordeal is over and you’ve had your first ‘date.’

Another way to get past the trauma of asking is to include another friend so it doesn’t look like a date. If all goes well on that trip to the movies, or whatever, you could say “Let’s do this again soon.” At that point you should probably wait for the next invitation to come from the other side. Some people set out to capture a romantic partner as they would set out to capture any prize, by perseverance. But this is inappropriate, you are not ‘entitled’ to the other person. Let her or him decide. If it’s a negative decision, don’t go berserk. You can always take up the study of ichthyology and find out how many other fish there are in the sea.

### *Sitting It Out*

An aside. I hope this author’s emphasis on *how* to start dating isn’t being construed as encouragement *to* date. You should date only if you desire to. For girls and boys who we see starring in soap operas, the central drama is about forming a relationship. For many people in the real world that is at the bottom of the priority list, other things being more important like sport, academic excellence, or just being a devoted couch potato. I did not start dating till adulthood and quite possibly didn’t miss out on anything, other than anxiety, expense, disappointment, etc.

Don’t worry, you will know when Person Right comes along. And it’s not something for which you have to rehearse by dating a string of Persons Wrong. In any case, if your motivation to date is to impress your peers, that is foolish. Buckling under to peer-pressure is generally daft, say I, but here there can be no satisfying your peers anyway. If you get a full dance card (ask Grandma what that means), the others are more likely to be envious than admiring, right? So who needs it?

## *Who's Paying?*

We may as well be candid about the problem of who pays for a date. The concern, however disguised it may be, is that the man pays the woman's way for a date and she repays him later with sex. Or maybe it's just that we are aware of that common idea and so we have to go to various lengths to avoid being associated with it. In either case, it is difficult for young people to know who should buy the movie tickets or who should pay for the dinner.

In order to relieve both parties of worry on the first date, it may help for the girl to say, early on "and I want to pay for mine." It has to be the girl that says it: if a boy says "Let's spilt the bill," he sounds like a cheapskate. Once this sweat is over, on the first date, the issue of who pays can be dealt with in a more relaxed manner or subsequent dates.

A good method is to have a 'division of labor' rather than a 50-50 split. He buys the admission tickets to the ice arena, she pays for the rental of the skates. Or she pays for the bowling, he buys the pizzas. Let the boy pay for the more costly thing: it saves face for him, without any of the connotations of controlling the girl.

## *Boys Will Be Gentlemen*

Guys, do you want to know how to be cool on a date? I mean really, really cool? Be chivalrous! Hold the door for her, drive the car, pay for the tickets, assist her in climbing over the mud puddle (perhaps not going to Sir Walter Raleigh's length of slinging your coat down on the mud), escort her right to her door, send flowers the next day. Will this make you look eager? Yes it will, but so what? you are eager, right?

Go ask your father or grandfather about 'cool.' They know a hundred times more than you or your peers know about

how to handle a woman. They know that the male's role as provider and protector has been around for eons, and that it is a rare female who does not respond to such maleness. Simple remarks of solicitude in your conversation at the restaurant, such as "Is the steak done to your liking?" or "Come on, fatten up on the whipped cream" will put you in the position of protector and provider. It doesn't have to be stronger than that; she will know that her knight in shining armor has arrived

### *The Spoon Test*

Now back to the restrictive function of etiquette. Some things should not be done. The issue is: how far can a couple go in public? My answer is: not far at all. In recent times couples have started to get very physical with each other in public gardens, college campuses, and on mass transit. This is highly indecorous and you shouldn't do it.

As a guide to what you can do, and without getting into anatomical description, let me say that etiquette allows you to spoon. If you think that what you want to do would fit under the term 'spooning,' go ahead and do it.

Here are some synonyms for the verb 'to spoon,' as found in *Roget's Thesaurus*:

bill and coo, dally, flirt, coquet, philander, serenade, woo, set one's cap at, pay one's court, make amorous glances, ogle.

And just think: you can't get arrested for ogling.

Women are angels, wooing:  
Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing:  
That she beloved knows naught that knows not this:  
Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.

***Troilus and Cressida***, Act 1, Scene 2

## Chapter 10

### Protocol at the Podium

This is the one chapter of the book that is not about etiquette. It is about a related subject, protocol. Eventually a day will arrive when you will be asked to make a formal presentation, and you will need to understand protocol. The word comes from the Greek, *protokollon*, a sort of Contents page found at the beginning of a roll of papyrus. In the diplomatic, military, and business world, protocol means fixed routines and wordings.

Every four years at the Olympic ceremony we hear a Head of State proclaim meaningfully “And I hereby declare open the Atlanta (or whichever) Games.” It is not for him to change it and say “Today I wish to open these games,” or, “And now, tada, the games.” We all want to hear the expected words and it would be a let-down to hear anything else.

You catch my drift. For a formal presentation you must find out exactly what is expected of you and do it, more or less colorlessly. Knowing that the task is highly circumscribed should save you from lying awake the night before, worrying how to be full of *savoir faire*. Oddly enough, if you stick to the protocol you will appear to have great *savoir faire*.

If your podium job consists of giving an introduction, ask the organizer to furnish you with the proper greetings. As long as the organizer knows who has been invited, and who has clearly accepted the invitation, it will be possible to write out the wording in advance. “Honorable Mayor, Mr. Joseph Cabalieri; School Principal, Sister Immaculata Maria; esteemed alumni; parents of the graduates; Ladies and Gentlemen. Tonight we are here to witness the awarding of diplomas to the sixty-seven graduates of ...”, etc.

No matter how many times you’ve glanced at the script with your eyes, you still need to rehearse it out loud. Is Mr.

Cabaliere's name pronounced with four or five syllables? That is, do you say Ca-bal-i-er-i, or Ca-bal-ye-re? If unsure, phone the mayor's secretary. Seriously, she wants to get your call on the matter. Mispronunciation is a major, major gaffe.

On the night of the event, check with someone to make sure the mayor is really there. If not, you'll need to skip his name. If there could be confusion over rank (the Duchess is also in the audience, but she is there as a godmother of a graduate), you may have to avoid the naming of any names. Use "Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen"; that will cover any occasion in a non-controversial way. It's best to say it sloooooowly or proclaim it.

After rehearsing it at home, in front of the mirror or with your friends as critics, you'll still need to carry the script with you on a large-print note card. (Why not also have your Mother sit in the front row harboring an emergency cue-card?). The point is that you must not under any circumstance blow it.

Mental blocks sometimes occur, and the audience does *not* want you to say "Sorry, I'm mixed up." They also don't want you to ask, "Should I start over?" If you've made a mistake, just correct the mistake and carry on, with your dignity intact.

Finally, no matter how low a rung you occupy on the school's ladder, you should realize that you *are* the school at that moment. (Just as you *are* the burger restaurant when serving a burger to a customer.) The audience looks to you to be in charge. Thus, if lights go out unexpectedly, or a dog crosses the stage, you should somehow 'man' the station. I don't mean *you* have to get the lights working, or deal with that dog; one of the teachers will do that. Just continue to look like you are maintaining protocol. Do not fall out of rank.

Be not afraid of greatness: some men are born great,  
Some achieve greatness,  
and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.

*Twelfth Night*, Act 2, Scene 5

## Chapter 11

### Invitations

Have you ever sent out invitations? Start to write up a make-believe guest list; you will probably want to use it and throw a barbecue.

Note: Don't ever plan an event at your home without checking with your housemates, especially your parents. You may think you are the host, but inevitably much of the responsibility (e.g., for rides home) will fall on them. You should never take it for granted that they will cooperate, even if 100% of the time they say "Sure, dear." It always shows consideration to *ask*, rather than merely to inform after the decision is made.

The etiquette of inviting involves both efficiency and graciousness. Efficiency requires that all the relevant data be given in the initial invitation, not added later. As you will see on pre-printed forms, this means telling the person *where*, *when*, and *what*. For instance "at our house, 365 Chestnut Street, Milton, Saturday July 16 at 8.00 pm, to celebrate Mike's bronze medal." Efficiency also requires that you tell them to 'RSVP' (*repondez s'il vous plait*, French for 'please answer').

#### *Ostentatious Humility*

Now for the graciousness bit. Get rid of any sense that you are doing the person a favor by inviting her. (We know you are, she knows you are, but this should not be part of the atmosphere). Rather, stress the fact that you are asking for a favor: would she please come to your party. This is expressed in formal invitations that begin with 'The honor of your presence is requested at the graduation of our son Luke' or 'the pleasure of your company is requested at a ball on May 3rd.'



Kids can employ those phrases, too, as long as it sounds sincere. Even if you are doing the invitations by phone, the rule of ‘humbleness’ applies: don’t act like *you* are bestowing an honor by including the invitee. “My sister and I are having a disco at our house a week from Saturday. Would you be able to join us?” (not “would you like to be included?”). Or “We’d be pleased if you can come.” Maybe that wording is too stilted, but you get the idea. Even saying “How about it?” is okay if your tone implies that you are begging him. Then, when he says “Yes” you shout “Great!” or something like that.

Don’t forget that phone invitations require the efficiencies noted above. Give him all the specifics he needs, about time and place, including an estimate of when the party will end. In the old days, formal invitations said ‘Carriages at nine’ meaning you should send your horse-and-buggy driver back to pick you up from the host’s dinner party at 9:00pm.

### *Savoring the Preliminaries*

More on graciousness. The lead-up to your party is a time in which you can start to display your hospitality skills. Show concern as to how the guest may get to your home. Sending a map for drivers is always appreciated. Not everybody owns a GPS.

You should also let your guests know that you have foreseen any special needs. (“I realize you can’t eat nuts, so when you get here please come into the kitchen to inspect the packages of cookies or the cake mix, if you wish.”)

1<sup>st</sup> Witch: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

2<sup>nd</sup> Witch: When the hurly-burly’s done

When the battle’s lost and won.

3<sup>rd</sup> Witch: That will be ere the set of sun.

***Macbeth***, Act 1, Scene 1

## Chapter 12

### On Time

How do you feel about punctuality? Do you think it is not worth fussing over? I realize that there are many occasions on which it is OK to show up a bit late, but you do risk offending people, as it seems to say that you have an “anything goes” approach.

A person who is habitually late will never acquire a reputation for responsibility even if she is conscientious about other things. Conversely, someone who is not particularly clever and not a significant contributor to the group, but who unfailingly shows up on time, will leave a favorable impression. He has, after all, proved that he ‘won’t let you down.’

#### *The Hidden Meanings of ‘Two O’clock’*

Say you are asked to be somewhere at 2:00pm -- when should you actually arrive?

- If it is a business meeting you should be there a few minutes before 2:00pm. (That shows that you were prepared to deal with any delay that might have cropped up, such as difficulty finding a parking space.)
- If it is a wedding, the arrival time is 1:45, as will be discussed in the chapter on Wedding Guests. This is to assure that the bride, the ‘star of the show,’ can make an entrance to a waiting audience. On the same logic, you should arrive early when any important person needs to make a ceremonial entrance.
- If the event is one for which your absence at the opening would ruin it, for example if you have agreed to hand out the programs, then you really have to get there very early to allow for traffic jams, and to save your co-organizers

from getting into an anxiety state about you.

- If it is an Open House and the invitation says 2-5pm, you can get there anytime from 2 o'clock till about 4:15. After that, it would look like you were just trying to fulfil the obligation of making an appearance.
- If it is an invitation to a friend's home, for you only, I think you should arrive between 2:05 and 2:10. As a hostess, I start to dread the sound of the doorbell on the dot of the invitation hour, as I have usually left it to the last minute to apply my lipstick, or to turn on some background music. By the way, ringing the person's doorbell before 2:00, even by a few minutes, is taboo. You should take a walk around the block to kill time rather than catch the hostess unprepared.

Note that times of arrival differ from place to place and I am quoting only the rules familiar to me, which you can vary according to region. In the five cases just listed, I mentioned the *reason* for the rule. You can almost always work out a rule of etiquette by asking "What effect does my action have on others?"

### *Advising of Late Arrival*

When you find that you will, indeed, be late for something, etiquette says that you must relay this news as soon as you can. If the function is at a restaurant, phone the restaurant, and say "Please don't hold up the dinner for me;" otherwise the head of the party might delay all the proceedings till you arrive. Every hungry person there will be thoroughly delighted that you called in and prevented this.

If you will be very late arriving at a friend's house, you must not phone just before the time you are supposed to be there to say that you are an hour's drive *from* the house. She will easily see that you knew for quite a while that you would be late. (You must at least have known an hour ago, when you had not yet got

on the road.) Had you done the right thing and phoned early, the hostess may have been able to alter a few things, like starting to roast the meat later, but when she gets your last minute call she is stuck.

Early notice of any change is normally appreciated. Say you have told a hostess that you will bring three chairs to her picnic on Saturday. Then, on Tuesday, your car gives up the ghost and you realize you will be travelling to her house by bus. Call her right then to announce “Sorry, no chairs.” This gives her plenty of time to ask someone else to bring extra chairs.

### *Excuses for Lateness*

Assuming that you *do* turn up late, what does etiquette require? It requires that you not offer a lame excuse, or a convoluted excuse. Just convey that you regret it and that you blame yourself. (Shifting the blame onto the bus driver, the erratic elevator, or the weather will only reinforce your image as irresponsible.) The phrase “forgive me” should crop up if you see that your lateness has really caused the person some distress. But don’t belabor the matter or belittle yourself to the extent that they start apologizing to you for making you feel uncomfortable!

If you walk into a meeting room late, the correct phrase is “Sorry I’m late.” If walking into a very large gathering, say nothing. And do walk over to a proper seat, rather than hover around the outskirts, as that annoys the speaker, and distracts everyone else. Go on, march bravely to a chair.

And oftentimes excusing of a fault  
Doth make the fault worse by the excuse.  
***King John***, Act 4, Scene 2

## Chapter 13

### Who Borrowed My...?

The same eleven-year-old who suggested a chapter on slouching and slumping also suggested one on 'lending and borrowing.' I didn't ask her why the issue came to her mind so readily, but you can bet it was because someone has annoyed her by asking for a loan, or by failing to return a borrowed item.

The basic common sense rule on lending and borrowing is: don't do either. Both are minefields for hurt feelings and long-term grudges. You should lend only when it appears to you that human decency calls for it, or in unusual one-off situations. Such a situation would be where you own something -- an ice pick -- that your friend and neighbor Chan has no ordinary use for, but on a once-only occasion he needs to borrow it, for an hour. It would be unreasonable to say "If you need an ice-pick, go buy one."

Likewise you should not *borrow*, except in an emergency or when you need something which, like the ice-pick, you will only use once. However, if you *do* decide to try to borrow an item from someone, then three *very firm rules* of etiquette come into play.

First, you must give the other person a lot of scope to refuse. He may, after all, be deeply inclined to refuse, but is too flustered to say "No" to you. Come right out and say "Look, Derek, I'm proposing to ask for a loan of your laptop computer to type one urgent assignment, but I realize that this is cheeky and that you may be reluctant to lend it." Then he has enough room to reply without fear of angering you: "Yes, Bill, I do feel hesitant. Last time I lent it out somebody erased my files, which drove me nuts."

Once that person has stated his lack of enthusiasm for lending, you *must* drop the issue. If, however, he says “Yes, it’s okay with me if you borrow it,” you then have to invoke the second rule. It consists of the fact that you and he must clearly articulate what the deal consists of what the terms are. For example you say to Derek, “When I borrow it, I’ll time exactly how much on-line work I do, and pay you for your server.” (And if he says “No need, it’s cheap,” you say “OK, thank you.”)

Also note the condition of the item you are borrowing: if it is a grease-stained barbecue grill you should make some subtle reference to the fact. You could say “What kind of cloth should I wipe it with?” Otherwise, on the day of return you may worry that you will be blamed for stains made before you took custody of it!

The basic rule of borrowing, remember, is *don’t borrow*; it breaks up friendships. So, if you must borrow, take seriously the aforementioned two rules of etiquette: When broaching the idea of the loan, give the person scope to say “No,” and when going ahead with the deal, state in unambiguous language the terms of the agreement.

And the third rule in regard to borrowing? Don’t forget to return the item!

### *Lending and IOUs*

The etiquette rules of *lending* are similar to the ones for borrowing. Pretend Indira has asked to borrow your necklace. If you wish to say “No,” you really should summon up the courage and say “No.” You could probably spare her feelings by indicating that you *wish* you could lend it but can’t. (“My mother would kill me” is a useful generic phrase in such circumstances.)

Again, though, if you do choose to lend, you should feel unabashed about clarifying the terms of the offer. Let’s say it’s

your valuable Stradivarius violin, which you are lending to a promising young player for one concert. Do not hand it over *until* the contingencies have been discussed. What if he bruises it? What if it is stolen? And when exactly is he going to return it?

Whether you are acting as borrower or lender, it is reasonable to propose that a written IOU be composed. If it's a money loan this is especially wise, and can be used to record the terms as well. Will there be interest? At what percent? When will the payments begin? Such points are very easy to chat about in advance, but once she starts to default on the loan it becomes extremely awkward to bring up such particulars.

About the third element, the return of the object. You should not feel too timid to ask for it back. Perhaps you have lent a tent to your neighbor Rick on the understanding that he return it by June 10<sup>th</sup>. When June 15<sup>th</sup> comes and he hasn't given it back, you can approach him, but not in a heavy-handed way. You could say "Is it all right if I take the tent back?"

No doubt there is someone in your life who has been holding on for a long time to an object that he or she borrowed from you. I challenge you right now to think up a non-accusatory way to ask for it back. Etiquette says you may do so. And while we're on the subject, have a look around your room to see if you yourself are harboring borrowed goods.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend.

*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 3

## Chapter 14

### Sportsmanship: Losing Gracefully

There is a rule in sport that says the loser must not express hostility to the winner. Indeed he must not pout and lament about his own disappointment (as in “Arrggh... I spent all this time and money coming up here to train for basketball and now, nothing!”)

That is not a rule of etiquette, it is a rule of sport and was probably invented to make the result of the game pleasant for the audience. Still, the phrase “Be a good sport” does carry over to other aspects of life. If your school has only three openings in the band, and five wannabes, the two who miss out are asked to be ‘good sports’ and not spoil the pleasure of the three who made it.

So, it is considered good etiquette to lose graciously and very bad etiquette to whine, or second-guess the selection process. Sure you feel bad, but don’t show it.

#### *An Aside from the Author*

I now take the liberty of going off the subject of etiquette for a moment to mention our sad state of affairs regarding sport.

Dear Young Person, you may think that the kill-for-a-win spirit that you encounter today is normal. It is not! And here I blame my generation. Two or three decades ago, we parents got the idea that our kids had to have every satisfaction, both in material goods and in satisfaction of the ego. This is quite crazy because not everyone can have the most or the best. If they did there would not be ‘the most’ or ‘the best,’ right?

A real loss to children has been those areas of pleasure that the parents themselves made use of in their youth. For



example, there was the pleasure of having to save up for a dilapidated first car (or even first bicycle), rather than being given one as a birthday gift. The teenager could thus be proud of his dilapidated car, and not worry that it did not have every option like the neighbor's teenager's car.

In sport, the source of pleasure was emotional. You belonged to a team, the team had great pride and loyalty. Individuals could experience that indescribable thing called *esprit de corps*, team spirit. *Belonging* was more important than winning. No parent (or hardly any parent) would maneuver, within the Little League team, to have his kid come out better than somebody else's kid. Parents who did that would soon feel the sting of ostracism.

No doubt the pendulum will swing back one day. Kill-to-win will not be part of the atmosphere anymore. If you can think of ways to hurry this process up, please do that.

He is the only man of Italy.

Always excepted my dear Claudio.

***Much Ado about Nothing***, Act 3, Scene 1

## Chapter 15

### Muffling the Bell (Funerals)

Of all the subjects about which you cannot afford to get your etiquette wrong, the most crucial one is death. Sadly, young people often stay away from wakes and funerals simply because they feel awkward or are afraid they might do or say the wrong thing. Yet their very absence from the funeral of an uncle or aunt is itself a serious breach of etiquette.

Because death is a terrible and unfathomable thing, all human societies have surrounded it with ritual. If there were no such fixed routines, the bereaved would have to try to deal with the shock on their own. At least if there are ceremonies to go through, as a group, the deceased's family and friends have the opportunity to support one another and share their emotions. The funeral also assigns each person a role to play in honoring the person who has died.

The title of this chapter recalls a nineteenth century practice, muffling the bell. After a person died it would be grotesque if someone rang the bell at his house, so neighbors used to put a cloth over the bell's clanger to mute it. They also decorated it with flowers and this later developed into the tradition of putting a wreath on the door of the deceased.

Some religious and ethnic groups have wakes, in which the body is laid in the coffin, and the coffin is left open so everyone can view the deceased person. This tradition, the wake, lasts for two nights, and is not usually characterized by drunken merriment, although sometimes it is.

On the day of the funeral, six men, known as pallbearers, carry the coffin to the church (if there will be a church service) or to the cemetery for burial. To be asked to be a pallbearer is a great honor. If the deceased has surviving sons or brothers, they

will almost always get the honor. Etiquette must be followed here. It would be considered out of line to choose a cousin if there were a brother available. However there is sometimes a different reason why a pallbearer is chosen. He may, for example, be the president of a charitable group for which the deceased person had devotedly worked.

### *Being There*

Your role, as a young person, is to attend the wake, or the burial, and thus to ‘pay respects.’ Just being there does this. The only guidance you need is: Dress conservatively, stay quiet, and look solemn. If there’s a chance you might smirk, out of nervousness, bring a handkerchief to hold over your mouth. Have no fear whatsoever of the outbursts of emotion you may see around you or the ones you may experience yourself. This is supposed to happen.

At a wake, you approach the coffin and find the appropriate person to console, usually the chief mourner. For instance, you walk up to the uncle whose wife, your aunt, has died and say “I’m sorry about this, Uncle Bill” or “How terrible.” By no means are you required to think of a brilliant comment. I typically say “I’m sorry for your trouble” or “I offer you my condolences.”

Afterwards you go and talk quietly (just above a whisper) with others. The funeral director may serve coffee and cookies in an outer room. There may be a Visitors’ Book. You *should* sign your name; it gives the relatives a valuable record of who attended.

Similarly, at the funeral ceremony, your role is passive. Just being there is enough. Someone will read a eulogy describing the person’s life and, if it is in a church, there will be prayers and hymn singing. (Note: inside a church, males should remove their hats.) At the cemetery, there could be an additional ceremony in

which each person is asked to toss a flower or dirt into the grave. (Don't worry, an usher will provide you with the flower.)

Today many people choose cremation over burial. If you are invited you should attend. There is nothing to be squeamish about, as it is all conducted out of sight. You will only need to participate in readings or listen to a eulogy.

Regarding transportation to a cemetery, a limousine is often provided for the guests. If not, and you drive your own car, you may be asked to drive very slowly (say, from the church to the cemetery) and to put headlights on. This is a way of identifying the funeral procession so other cars won't cut across it.

### *Sympathy Letters and Flowers*

If the death of a friend or relative occurs in a town too far from your home, you can still pay respects by sending a letter. This should be done within about two weeks of the funeral. A letter of condolence can be very short and a bit formal. Even if you do not normally say 'My dear Grandma' you can do so now and it will be appreciated. Just keep to the minimum relevant facts "I'm so sorry our beloved Grandpa has passed away. You certainly took magnificent care of him, Grandma. He will always be my hero. Love, John."

As to the matter of flowers, please obey what the family has stated in the newspaper. If they say 'No flowers,' they mean it. If they do not discourage flowers, and if you feel it would be appropriate to send some, you have a choice: you can send it to the funeral ceremony or send it to the mourner's home.

Should you happen to be in the immediate family of the deceased, someone will instruct you about a named wreath on the coffin. You may have seen wreaths saying 'Mother,' 'Son,' 'Aunt.'

## *Religious Variations*

In the Jewish faith the deceased person is buried, with viewing of the body being forbidden, and then a seven-day period of mourning is observed. This is called 'sitting shiva.' Friends visit the family at the deceased's home. If you visit, you may bring food for the bereaved.

In the Islamic religion, the body is ritually washed and prayed over, and must be buried within twenty-four hours. The deceased person is laid on his/her right side, facing the Muslims' holy city of Mecca.

For both Hindus and Buddhists the moment of death is seen as a moment of rebirth. Traditional rituals are performed over the body and then it is burned, usually in open air.

For Christians, death is thought to be the joyous time of reunion with God, therefore the funeral is somewhat celebratory. I note that recently it is becoming a custom among Catholics and Anglicans to refer to the funeral service as 'a Mass of Thanksgiving for the life of \_\_\_\_\_,' or 'a celebration of \_\_\_\_\_'s life,' rather than a mourning of his or her death.

In melting pot societies, such as the United States and Australia, there is a tendency for funerals to become standardized. Alas.

Praising what is lost  
Makes the remembrance dear.

*All's Well That Ends Well*, Act 5, Scene 3

## Chapter 16

### At Table

A young person who has his or her table manners down pat has most likely got other areas of etiquette under control. No doubt even the beginner of the subject of this book is aware of certain fundamental rules, such as don't talk with food in your mouth, and don't dip your used spoon back into the serving dish (that is a major boo-boo). Also, you're supposed to ask to have the salt or ketchup *passed* to you, rather than 'do the boarding house reach.' "Gretchen, the salt, s'il vous plait..."

Table manners, like other manners, are a joy. They give you a sense of personal dignity, and self-confidence; at least you know you will not be making a gaffe. And if the others are following the same rules, you will be relieved not to have to watch anyone talk with food in his mouth, or be unruly in a way that would make meal time a hassle rather than what it naturally is: one of the day's best moments.

#### *Table Manners at Home*

Naturally, manners at home are less demanding than those when guests are present, or when you attend a formal dinner. For example, it's normal to put a bottle of salad dressing on the table at home, where for a fancy table one would pour the dressing into a cruet. Other packaged items are allowed to appear at home, such as a box of cereal, or a juice bottle.

Most likely at home you'll 'dig in' as soon as the food arrives (unless your family says Grace, in which case you should not sample anything beforehand). It's also acceptable for you to reach across the kitchen table, to get the butter. Heck, you may even put your elbows on the table. (This is a personal aside: I, frankly, can't see anything wrong with elbows on the table.)

At home, the main difference is that you should enjoy family time in a relaxed way. The dinner table is the obvious place at which to exchange news. It isn't the place to fight or complain. Come on, enjoy the moment. Dispense a few smiles. Perhaps even a compliment "Sis, your new haircut is majorly good."

Never treat the cook, usually mother, as your servant. If 'A' is the cook who prepared the meal, 'B' should fetch the dessert, and 'C' should stack the dishes. 'D' should wash them. The cook gets a 'Thank you' at the end of a meal, and should have got a compliment as soon as something delicious was encountered. "Mom, these lamb brains are exceptional!"

### *Table Manners When Dining Out*

Today most 'restaurant' meals take place at fast food establishments. Here you are merely required to observe sufficient decorum so as to not bother people at other tables.

In a real restaurant? One with tablecloths, waiters, and perhaps a *maitre d'* (French for 'master of the hotel'), there are many more rituals. First, you should phone ahead and make a reservation (and call promptly to cancel if you change your mind). On arrival you should stand inside the door and wait for the hostess to seat you. She will give you each a menu and possibly take drink orders at that point.

It is more than acceptable for you to ask the waiter for an explanation of a menu item, and to inquire if it is possible for them to vary it, such as "Could you serve the chili sauce on the side, please?" However, you are not supposed to request substitutes when ordering from the specials on a fixed-price menu for two or three courses, as the chef has probably arranged things to his convenience. It's OK when ordering from a menu where each item is a separate entity. This is known as ordering '*a la carte*' (French for 'from the menu'). If you need something when he or she is on the other side of the room you can call

‘Waiter’ or ‘Waitress’ not ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam.’ You can make a gesture like scribbling on paper to tell him that you are ready to receive the bill. It’s polite to request additional cutlery and empty plates if you want to share part of your meal.

At tipping time your conscience comes into play. You are supposed to give whatever is the required tip in your city (at least 15%), plus more if the waiter has gone out of his way for you. If the service was atrocious you can discount the tip or even omit it, but most people don’t have the nerve to do so.

Full tip is not required at a completely self-service restaurant, such as a buffet, or for take-away meals. Tipping is customary for delivery of food to your door, unless a fixed delivery fee has already been charged. When calculating the amount to tip in a restaurant, apply it to the pre-tax bill.

### *When Entertaining a Special Guest at Home for a Meal*

Say there are five family members and two guests at your home dinner table. All five family members should act like the host, doting on the visitors, inquiring if they want the pepper, or refilling their water glass when it gets too low. Beyond that point of ‘attitude,’ which is all-important, table manners are the same as usual, but more restrained. For instance, no reaching over. The table will also look fancier. You might put a centerpiece on the table, or candlesticks, and your best tablecloth and no packaged food. Don’t rush the guest through the meal. Each course should be paced, and conversation should deliberately be made.

This brings me to the subject of television. Should families watch TV during meals? I personally think they should not, but that is not a matter of etiquette. When visitors are present, however, it *is* an etiquette issue. The implication of having a TV on, while a guest dines with you, is that you value the guest’s conversation less than the chatter on the TV.



You must decide in advance if phone calls will be accepted. If so, the volume of the ringtone should nevertheless be turned low. If a call comes in, the host must say to a caller “We have company right now, may I phone you back later?”

### *Setting the Table*

When guests are present, be sure there is a napkin (or ‘serviette’) next to each plate and sufficient cutlery for every course. Stemware goes near the top *right* of the person’s plate, water glasses to the left. Put the salt and pepper on the table, and a mat to accept the hot gravy boat when it arrives. You may wish to lay out in advance any other garnish, such as a dish of cranberry sauce, if refrigeration is not needed. This will save you from having to get up to bring it to the table later.

We used to put the cream and sugar on the table, but now we often take orders for coffee and tea and make them up in the kitchen (‘white coffee’ means with milk). Keep artificial sweeteners on hand for those who can’t eat sugar. In a home setting, guests are happy to receive their coffee in a mug, but a cup and saucer look much nicer. Note that a cup holds less than a mug, so you need to be alert to refill the guest’s cup. But first announce it. “I’ll get you some more coffee.” Announcing is better than *asking* “Do you want more?” as they then may feel they should say “No.”

When you are the host, you want to appear generous but not overbearing with the food and drink. If you put extra beverage on the table, such as a jug of juice, any guest who is in need can take it without having to ask. Nevertheless, the hostess should offer to refill empty glasses. If seconds of the main course are available, the hostess should say so in a rather matter-of-fact way; “There is plenty more of everything except the carrots, if anyone would like seconds.” (Never say “But if you don’t want it, Johnny can have it when he gets home late tonight.”)

One can usually sense if a guest wants more but is too polite to ask. When I serve a meal and calculate that the guests probably want seconds, I say “I’m going to have another helping. You, too?” That clearly makes it okay for them to join in. If they all say “No,” then I quietly lose interest in doing so myself.

Diets are important, hence you should be prepared to obey a genuine ‘No’ from any guest. You can give notice that you are about to serve a huge slab of pie by saying “Aunt Erin, this is going to be your slice” as you start to cut. She can then say “Oh, not for me, just one third of that, please.” At this point, any further coaxing is out of order. Do exactly as she requests, but you could leave some slices on a plate for anyone to reach for later. If you then notice Aunt Erin sneaking a piece, try not to tease her unmercifully.

When you’re the invited guest and have a dietary request, the time to tell the hostess is when she makes the invitation. Not the day before the meal, as she has probably done the shopping for it by then. Not at the meal, as this can only result in her feeling bad about her inability to have your specialty. Should she have failed to realize that you are allergic to fish, and there is only one other item served -- potato -- you should carry on as though you are simply rapturous about eating potato.

### *Do We Dig in to the Hot Food When It Arrives, or What?*

Here is a situation in which the experts on etiquette would say Yes you can do it, yet it may be best for you to refrain. You are seated in a fancy restaurant or are at home with guests. Your dinner plate arrives. Are you supposed to begin, or wait until everybody has his plate? The rule is that if the food is hot you should eat it. (My cousin Ann says “Use the brains God gave you. Eat the food before it goes cold.”) I have also heard a rule “If more than 8 people being served, start when the food arrives.”

Still, as I said, it may pay to refrain from digging in. If others don't know the "God gave you" logic, you may look gluttonous. But when you're the host, do encourage folks to start as soon as their hot plate arrives. My spouse used to say "Go for your life."

*A Quick Checklist of Don'ts in a Fine Restaurant*

For those who worry about making a gaffe (i.e., a botch, a blunder, a bungle, a boo-boo, a blooper, a *faux-pas*) I offer the following list:

- Don't stack up or hand your plates to the waiter – that's his job.
- Don't demur if he pulls out a chair for you, or drapes your lap with the napkin.
- Don't discuss any calorie-count restrictions; pretend that gastronomic indulgence has your complete approval.
- Don't mind the business of people at other tables.
- Don't use the napkin as a handkerchief.
- Don't ask for separate bills. Show your respect to the restaurateur by assuming that he wants his staff to spend time on food-preparation, not on arithmetic.
- Don't exit in haste. The *maitre d'* may wish to escort you to the door and bid you goodbye. If he does, say "We had a lovely evening," or words to that effect.

He was a man  
Of an unbounded stomach.

*Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 2

## Chapter 17

### Basic Benign Behavior aboard the Bus

Here are a simple dozen rules of etiquette to be observed on the bus, or the commuter train.

- Don't be sullen and surly if the bus driver asks to see your ticket or school ID card.
- Don't sling your backpack around so it hits seated passengers in the face.
- Feel free to smile and say 'May I sit here?' if some selfish creep has used up more than her half-share of the space.
- Don't plunk junk in the aisles.
- *Do* jump up and abandon the 'disabled and elderly seats' at the front if an apparently qualified person gets on the bus. (Often a sign says that you are *required* to do so.)
- Don't duck away from sitting near an unattractive person as though he or she had the plague.
- Be a credit to your school if you are in uniform.
- Don't even think of using foul language on the bus. (In some states you can get arrested for it!)
- No hair-combing please (Yuck).
- Don't make a verbal offer to stand up for an older person, just do it. If, however, they say "No, you sit there," obey them and look pleased.
- Be aware that a young mother needs a seat if she has a toddler holding on to her.

- Always say “Thank you” to the bus driver, when getting off the bus. He/she got you to your destination, no mean feat.

Note: it is pretty obvious that I am talking about a bus in a relatively calm community. Statistics show that many students are actually afraid to use buses. Etiquette can’t come to the rescue here but you *should* seek help and not just tough it out alone. That is true of any bully situation.

I would there were no age between sixteen and twenty three, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting.

*The Winter’s Tale*, Act 3, Scene 3

## Chapter 18

### The Longed-for RSVP

For the purposes of this chapter, assume that you are the invitee rather than the inviter. You've just opened your mail and found an invitation for a party. Today is April 5. The party is to take place on April 20. You realize that you have a conflicting appointment that day. The host has said, "RSVP by April 12." Should you call him now, on April 5, or wait till closer to the deadline?

How does an etiquette writer like myself answer this question? The answer is: call him now. I hope you guessed it correctly. The easy way to work out a rule of etiquette is to put yourself in the other person's shoes. If you were the inviter you would want to get information as soon as possible, right? The host in this case is probably juggling some decisions, such as whether to ask his nephew to do the bartending, depending on how many guests are coming. The sooner he has a critical mass of 'yes's' or 'no's,' the sooner he can finalize his plans.

Even more importantly, if you get your 'no' in promptly, he would have the option of inviting a substitute. Thus he can send an invitation to Vanessa now and she will think she was in the first string of guests. For you to hold off on notification until April 12 means that he will have to invite Vanessa fairly late (assuming he is keen to have no empty chairs at the dinner table). Vanessa may have heard from Eleanor that Eleanor got her invitation on April 5 and will be aware of her 'second string' status. This is no bad thing, we party givers all realize that it's part of the deal, but if you can help your host by calling early, he will remember you kindly next time.

Graciousness, also, is a duty of the receiver of an invitation. Just as Tilly was supposed to say that she feels

honored that Milly has agreed to come to her party, Milly is supposed to tell Tilly that it is a thrill to be invited! The guest can also participate in the lead-up to the event by saying, “Would you like me to give Angela a ride? She lives near me.” Or “Is there any thing I can bring?” In other words, you can be a good guest before you even arrive. It’s fun to do this -- it makes the party last longer.

### *Formal Acceptances and Regrets*

Look at the invitation. If it is made in a very formal manner, your reply must follow suit. Here is the standard wording in a regret:

Cecelia and Craig Little regret that they cannot attend Leigh’s graduation celebration because they will be in New York that day.

The correct *acceptance* wording includes a mention of the date and time. This assures the host that you understand the particulars:

Mary Jones accepts with pleasure your kind invitation to tea at 4:00 pm on Saturday April 16 at the President’s Lodge. She will be accompanied by her niece Alice Jones. (That is, if the invitation was to ‘Mary Jones and guest.’)

Don’t be afraid to talk about yourself in the third person. It is ultra-correct in this instance.

If the invitation comes by phone, you can be more casual:

“Yes, I believe we’ll be around that day – what time do you want us?”

“Oh that’s great; around two o’clock please”.

“Lovely, we’ll be there. Do you mean the kids as well?”

“Oh yes, all of you” (Or “No, we had in mind just the adults.”)

“Fine, then, see you on Labor Day at two o’clock.”

The person making the call has no obligation to carry on extended banter. She can hang up and go to the next name on the list. Possibly the invitee does not know this rule and may say “Have you seen the half price sale at the garden shop?” in which case one must be polite and chat. (Ah, if only everyone knew etiquette inside out.)

### *The Dreaded Maybe*

When giving your RSVP, make it a yes or a no. Granted there may be occasions where you are not yet sure if you can make the date. It is polite to give a *No*, and tell the inviter what the problem is. “Kalila, I’d better say ‘no.’ I would like to attend, and there’s an 85% chance I could make it, but Bob is due to have a weekend home from the army soon. I don’t know if it would be that weekend. If he is home we won’t want to go anywhere.”

This not only tells her what the chances are, it tells her that you are genuinely interested if it’s a non-Bob weekend. Perhaps then *she* will say “Let’s call it a maybe.” But if *you* give the maybe, you are being discourteous because it ties her up.

But, soft! Methinks I do  
digress too much.

*Titus Andronicus*, Act 1, Scene 1



## Chapter 19

### Madam President, May I Present...

Introductions are important. Let's say you are in the schoolyard with your friend Pauline. Another friend of yours, Lara, who has never met Pauline, comes over to talk to you. You can't just start talking to Lara as if Pauline weren't there. It would make Pauline feel as if she had disappeared. You have to say "Pauline, this is my friend Lara from the soccer team" (or some such identifying clue).

At a more formal gathering you'd actually have to introduce *both* to each other. "Margaret, this is my brother Charles." And then to Charles: "Charles, Margaret went to Northern Grammar with me."

Now here's the hard part: Whose name do you mention first? In the first example, you said *Pauline* this is Lara, because Pauline was there first. She must be given priority, as Lara is a Lara-come-lately. In the second example you said "*Margaret*, this is my brother Charles." Can you figure out why?

The answer is: because you are supposed to put yourself and your family in the position of low priority, and let the non-family person get the honor. The rule is: *introduce the lesser person to the greater person*. I always had trouble remembering this until someone said "It's easy; just think of "Your Majesty, may I present my friend Ben?" It's pretty clear that you wouldn't say "Ben, may I present the Queen?"

Frequently there is a need to introduce several people at once and, luckily, this does not call for a pecking order. Say you have invited three couples to your home for dinner, and your brother Matthew also happens to be in the house.

When the first couple arrives, say “Bert and Mary, I’d like you to meet my brother Matthew.” Then they, of course, will say “Hi Matthew,” or “How do you do?” and perhaps the two men will shake hands (optionally, the woman, too). Note: the correct reply to “How do you do” is “How do you do,” or “Pleased to meet you.” Never start telling them how you actually *do*.

Later, when Dick and Jane arrive, things are starting to get complicated so you can *dispense* with the rule about mentioning family members last, and go from left to right so the newcomers can remember the names and faces in order. “Dick and Jane, this is my brother Matthew, and Simon from the office and his wife Maria.” Then you have to give Dick and Jane a bit of a promo. “Dick and Jane live in the apartment across the hall.”

Finally, when the couple Geraldo and Lisa arrive, you should realize that names have probably already been forgotten, so try to do a good job of reinforcing every name. It is *perfectly* all right for you to mention the act of introducing. Thus, you can say “I’ll wait till Matthew has taken everyone’s coat before I do the introductions.” Then, if you can cope with this, remember that it’s the *newcomers* who are now in need of being welcomed by name (since the already-there have started to become friends). “Geraldo and Lisa, I’d like you to meet Dick and Jane from across the hall, Simon who works with me, Maria his wife, and this is my brother Matthew.” Then give *them* a promo: “Geraldo and I, as you know, are writing a play, and Lisa is his partner.”

### *Remembering the Name*

We all forget the names of people we have been introduced to (sometimes instantly!). Therefore it is acceptable etiquette for you to ask a person to remind you of his or her name, but it must be preceded with a light apology. “I’m sorry I didn’t get your name” then add “I’m Josh Wilkinson, I’m married to Emma over there.” Never say “I’m bad on names;” that

smacks of “I really don’t give a hoot.” Also, it is not a wise idea to take a wild guess as to the name. A Peter does *not* like to be called Paul.

If you are young, you will not yet encounter the further job of trying to ‘mix’ people. At large gatherings this is done according to their similar interests. “Come over here, Lindsay, I want you to meet that family that runs the antique shop.” “Joe and Jennifer, I’ve been telling my neighbour Lindsay here about your antique shop. She is a retired importer of old clocks.” As soon as they have started to chat you can slip away.

They say it really helps if you say the name as soon as you hear it -- “How do you do, *Lindsay?*” -- as your memory will register it better. Whenever I hear a telephone operator give his/her name, as in “Qantas Airlines, this is Bridget speaking, how may I help you?” I always say “Hello, *Bridget*, I’d like to change my ticket.” Invariably I remember the name (for at least a few minutes) if I’ve said it, and invariably I don’t if I haven’t.

So, earlier on, in the schoolyard example, if you were Pauline and I had said “Pauline this is my friend Lara” it would have been good for you to say “Hi, Lara.” I realize you may be shy and you’d probably prefer to get away with Hi, or just a smile. But take the bold step, say “Hi, Lara,” and nobody will think the worse of you for it.

I cannot tell what the dickens his name is.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act 3, Scene 2

## Chapter 20

### Wedding Guests

If you are thinking of getting married in the near future, or even in the distant future, and you want to know the drill for the big day, there are many books and bridal magazines that can instruct you. It is a complicated event and I cannot give the wedding party any help here. This chapter contains only some things that the *guests* need to know.

The essential fact is: it is the *bride's* day: all attention is on her. Thus it follows that the most critical rule of etiquette is: do not call attention to yourself at a wedding. Even if you are second-in-command, that is, the maid of honor, don't make a sudden decision to ride a motorcycle down the aisle. Stay humble in your role. It is the bride's day.

Guests need to arrive early. Ask your mother if she can name names of people who were late for weddings she has attended. I'll bet she can rattle some off (I can), even though many years have passed. This is because being late for a wedding is such a breach of etiquette, such a clumsy move, that it will never be forgotten. By the way, getting to a 10 o'clock wedding on time means arriving at about 9:45.

If it is a church wedding, the bride arrives after everyone is seated so that everyone can turn around and see her for the first time in her gown. A church organist gives the signal, everyone stands up and looks at the bride, who usually leans on the arm of her father as she comes down the aisle. He then 'gives her away' to the groom, at the front of the church.

As a guest, you will be instructed throughout the day as to what is happening next. If you have brought a gift, look to see if a special table has been set out to display the gifts. If not, it may be better to deliver it to the family's home later.

There is palpable relief by the time the party gets to the reception hall or restaurant because the major duties are over. Still, keep up your good manners and your awareness of the fact that it is the bride's day. When the band starts to play, the guests cannot get up to dance until certain set pieces are performed, such as the dance of the groom with the mother-of-the-bride. (Sometimes the groomsmen do Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.)

Do laugh at the jokes made by the Best Man in his speech, and then rise to toast the new couple. This is done by raising your champagne glass, toasting the couple, and then taking a sip. (If the Best Man says "We now toast Diane and Ari," everyone repeats "Diane and Ari"). Later there will be a cake-cutting ceremony and probably a throwing of the bouquet by the bride.

You are not supposed to leave until these things are done. Traditionally, all guests are supposed to wave the couple goodbye as they drive off. Perhaps this is no longer a custom, but leaving a wedding too early is only a few points down, in the gaffe rating, from arriving too late.

Your costume for the day should be your very best gear. An 'evening' handbag can be used at a daytime wedding. My advice is, don't carry a lot of valuables because if they get lost or stolen, that episode could spoil the bride's day, or if she finds out about it later, it could mar her memory of the event. If you break your ankle while dancing at her wedding, slip out of the venue, catch a taxi, and don't ever let her know it happened.

It is her day for perfect happiness.

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,  
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.

*A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, Act 2, Scene 1

## Chapter 21

### Waiter, There's a Flaw in My Soup

'Consumer awareness' dates back to only about the 1960s. At that time, modern society had become very large and the relationship between producer and consumer had become quite distant, compared to earlier times when one might know personally the man who made one's shirts or baked one's bread.

It is a good thing that people sense their rights and that they get angry when cheated, for instance by a manufacturer who turns out poorly made goods, and it is a good thing to make a fuss when people are routinely kept waiting at a hospital or a government office. However, the rules of etiquette do not get thrown out of the window just because a consumer-rights issue is involved. The opposing parties must maintain civility.

I have frequently seen young people attack the wrong person when they feel their rights are at issue. If you don't approve of the fee that your bank has imposed, on a bounced check, it is still not acceptable for you to raise your voice to the teller, or even to give her an unpleasant look. *She* did not impose the fee.

You can say with absolute civility in your voice "I want this bank to know that I strongly object to a \$25 fee. It is unfair to the customer." That allows you to let off steam. Later, you can write a letter to the bank itself, again using polite words even if your message is strong. (A rude letter never conveys credibility).

*Being Big with Small Businesses*

Teenagers often don't realize that if it is a small merchant or producer, the tone should not be demanding. The small

merchant is your friend and neighbor, you should start out by putting your complaint hesitantly and even humbly. The restaurant owner or even the short-order cook who has prepared the day's meals in good faith does not deserve to hear "This is awful," or children's favorite word: "disgusting."

The correct way to nurture your friendship with this person who plays a significant role in your life is to say "Waiter, this soup seems to me to be quite over-salted." Then let him resolve the problem. He is well trained to do that, as his customers matter vitally to him. Once he brings you a substitute, etiquette requires that you look satisfied, even if the second batch is worse than the first. Smile and say "Thank you." If necessary, you can 'vote with your feet' by not going to that restaurant again.

You are also advised to get into the habit of giving praise where it is due. Wait till you are a hairdresser some day and see how pleased you feel when one of your 'heads' phones and says "That was a really great cut. My boyfriend adores it."

My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,  
or else my heart concealing it will break.

*The Taming of the Shrew*, Act 4, Scene 3

## Chapter 22

### Being in Step

Blended families are very common now – and they are sometimes called ‘bonus families.’ You will find that many of your classmates go away on weekends to their Dad’s home, and that maybe he has a new wife with built-in kids. Or maybe you yourself live with Mom, a Stepdad, the teenage daughter of the Stepdad who is now your stepsister, and a new baby born to your Mom and Stepdad who is your half-brother.

A first etiquette issue that might be mentioned here is the naming of these relationships. Find out what the persons want you (an outsider) to call them, and proceed accordingly. In the above example, I used the term ‘Stepdad,’ but if I were conversing with a friend, I would at first refer to him as ‘your stepfather.’ Just follow her lead.

Similarly, in many blended families the kids say “This is my sister Keiko and my brother Jack,” not “This is my half-sister Keiko and my stepbrother Jack.” The sensitive thing for you to do is try to fit in with their established pattern.

#### *Distress and Tolerance*

Possibly, some young readers of this book who are distressed by the step relationships in their own home are hoping that I will offer guidelines on how to bring ‘fairness’ into the situation. Not exactly. The guidance counsellor at school will no doubt welcome students to discuss such matters, indeed it is their job to do just that. Here I can only talk about the etiquette aspect.

The sharing of love is a legendarily difficult task. The rule is try to let consideration for the other person come to the fore



as often as you can. That is the essence of etiquette, even if you feel it is unfair that stepsiblings have invaded your life.

The following true story may help you: it helped me. My friend Esther resides in a nursing home in which each bedroom is a twin room. Her first roomie died, so she had the place to herself for quite a while. Then a new lady, Patricia, arrived and made Esther's life difficult, particularly as Patricia has a habit of roaming around and talking at night. I indignantly complained to the nursing home, "This situation is terrible for Esther. This room is her *home*." Quite calmly the nurse said, "And now it is Patricia's *home*, too." Hmmmm.

### *The Role of Stepparent*

As a child in a blended family, you might try to realize that the stepparent is in an inevitably awkward position. I am a stepmother myself, and have often noted that the plainly-evident role of Mother is not mine to seize. Some of my colleagues in stepmotherland say that they feel deeply responsible for the welfare of their stepkids, but are inhibited about being the authority figure. They can crack down on their own offspring with never a second thought, but stepchildren require second thought, third thought, eighty-fifth thought, etc. It is confusing.

I have not slept one wink.

*Cymbeline*, Act 3, Scene 4

## Chapter 23

### What Is the Dress Code Here?

Ask some teenagers if they prefer to have a dress code or complete freedom of clothing choice and they will probably say the latter. But if they started to experience ‘complete freedom’ they would soon long for rules of dress. Indeed if they thought about it carefully, they would realize that they are slaves to fashion and almost never make a free choice even when it *is* possible to do so!

That said, the trick is to know which dress codes apply to which circumstances and places. I belong to a club that requires any man, on the club premises, to wear blazer and tie, or, in summer, short-sleeve dress shirt and tie. This eliminates the problem of a member showing up in a tracksuit and making the other members feel overdressed. It saves the other men from feeling irritated by the young buck’s disregard for their sense of club spirit. Everybody’s happy because the decision has been taken out of the individual’s hands.

Now you may wish me to lay out the exact rules for you but this is difficult because I don’t know where you hang out. Also, the rules change every now and then. Some guidelines are pretty static. In a previous chapter I said that if you are attending a wake or funeral you should dress conservatively. This means modestly and inconspicuously. Thus the colors will be dark or neutral, not bright. The length of a girl’s skirt will be around the knee. Plunging neckline? That would be offensive.

#### *Old Dependables*

For a formal party in someone’s honor, say a 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary or a retirement gala, you honor the guest by looking really smart. I don’t think it matters what that consists of (except that it has to be spotless and pressed). You can virtually pretend

you are in a beauty contest. This will not upstage the leading person. It is also okay for you to look your age. If the retired man invited his 13 and 15-year old nieces he meant to have two people at the party that look approximately 13 and 15, or maybe 15 and 17 in their best garb, not 24 and 26.

Going to a concert or a play in a very nice venue? I suggest you overdress rather than under-dress. You will never feel bad if you're decked out in finery at a high cultural event. Conversely, if you wear truly inappropriate clothes (e.g., running shoes), you may feel embarrassed, and you will offend the dressed-up guests by spoiling their ritzy atmosphere.

What about a job interview? Take it from me: it *always* pays to look businesslike. Never mind that the job in question is dog-walker or toilet-cleaner. The recruiting agent takes certain messages from your appearance. If you look conservative and self-confident (and you will *feel* self-confident if you dress right), the agent will want to hire you. The competition will have consisted of a lot of questionably dressed kids.

If you find yourself invited to an event for which you can't guess the dress code, just phone the organizer. She *wants* you to turn up looking appropriate and will be glad you called. The same is true of a party at someone's house. You can ask "Is it casual dress?" A thoughtful hostess may have given guidance without waiting to be asked, especially if it's hard to judge from the timing of the party, such as Sunday afternoon.

'Black tie' means that the males wear tuxedo (strictly, strictly) and the females wear evening dress. That usually means full-length and perhaps shimmery; any color. At a black-tie event, be sure to check your man's ability to breathe because the bow tie and high collar, not to mention the cummerbund (belt), can be a bit much for first-timers.

See where she comes apparell'd like the spring.

*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Act 5, Scene 1

## Chapter 24

### Personal Hygiene

The word *hygiene* means health. But this is not a health book so I will not be saying “Eat your veggies” or “Walk up the stairs instead of using the elevator” -- OK?

I also will not be saying “Out of kindness to others, help them to have good health.” The mission here is limited to the etiquette rule: Be aware of what causes offense to others and try to avoid doing those things.

It is a breach of etiquette to comb or brush one’s hair in public. This may be because our hair always contains germs and the comb is tossing those germs around. Or it may just be that people find other people’s hair invasive if it comes too close to them.

It’s also considered offensive to pick your teeth, in public, perhaps for a similar reason: our mouths are full of bacteria. Actually most bacteria are not harmful but your neighbor may be under the impression that she is going to get your germs. Such a worry, justified or not, is something you want to protect her from, as a matter of etiquette.

#### *Infections of the Respiratory System*

Is it against etiquette to cough and sneeze? Well actually, yes, unless you cover your face with your hand, or with a tissue. The common cold is a virus that lives in a person’s lungs, throat, or nose for a short time. It gets catapulted out of one person and into another by coughing and sneezing. It can live in the air only for a few seconds, so if you cough in an empty auditorium this won’t result in any other person getting your cold. (Note: some

persons have a persistent ‘smoker’s cough;’ this is not contagious.)

What if you are invited to a friend’s house and you think you are coming down with a cold or the flu? You should cancel the date. Tell them you care about them and would be sad if your germs made them ill. Possibly they will insist that you come, in which case you may go -- you can’t be said to have breached etiquette. In most cases the friend will accept your offer of cancellation and be very grateful to you.

### *‘Food Poisoning’*

Another hygiene matter that influences etiquette is the handling of food. Bacteria on the hand get onto the food and can cause the eater of the food to be sick, with such symptoms as vomiting and diarrhea. Therefore, when you offer your guests a piece of cheese, hold the plate out to them and let them take the piece. They don’t want to see your hands on it. If your guests are bound to see you putting your hands in the food, such as to fillet a fish, you should ostentatiously wash your hands in front of them, or assure them that you have done so.

I go further. If you are about to hand around a type of food that the person needs to handle before eating, for instance he may have to peel an orange or take a chocolate éclair from the tray, you must offer him the chance to wash *his* hands. A good hostess says “I know you’ll want clean hands for this; our bathroom is second door on your left.” (A sophisticated host or hostess is never embarrassed to proclaim the location of the ‘facilities.’)

### *STIs: Sexually Transmitted Infections*

There are several sexually transmitted diseases, known as STIs. Years ago syphilis was the most infamous one, causing many deaths. In my youth, all couples applying for a marriage

license had to get a blood test, called a Wasserman, to determine if they were infected. Thus the bride would be clued in about the groom and vice versa.

Syphilis is now curable, but other STIs such as genital herpes, are not. They can be very painful and last a lifetime. The person who has the disease should tell the partner and not at the last minute when rational judgment has fled!

Note: it's *not* bad manners to inquire if your partner is HIV-positive. Etiquette has its place, but safety ranks higher. (Some states have made it legally punishable to infect an unsuspecting partner.) Take this as a rule: safety trumps courtesy.

### *Looking Clean and Smelling Clean*

Taking a shower and wearing reasonably clean clothes is good etiquette. A simple indicator of lack of cleanliness is a bad smell. Therefore, it is a quick rule of thumb to say that if you wish yourself upon company when you have not washed, you are breaching etiquette. Whether it is your body that is dirty or your clothes does not matter. Either may cause discomfort.

Trying to cover up with perfume or after-shave lotion is not a good idea. In fact, to put on a fragrance even over very clean skin may cause an etiquette problem. Not everyone wants to have perfume about, in a crowded bus -- or in a gourmet restaurant where the smell of the food is supposed to be the main gig. I suggest you go very easy on the cologne.

### *Are These Socks Ready?*

As the old pun goes, "If your feet smell and your nose runs, you're built upside down." Be that as it may, most people have feet that smell, myself excepted of course! At summer camp we use to sing a song about black socks. It said "I'm considering

sending my socks to the laundry but probably they're not yet ready.”

The problem nowadays is that shoes are made of non-porous synthetic material instead of leather. And they are often worn without any socks at all. That's bad news on a sweaty hot day; there's nowhere for the odor to escape. Logically, then, it seems to me that the rule of etiquette is: wear socks. Also, think twice about removing your shoes in a closed setting such as a car.

Ah, but what if you have to take your shoes off because you are visiting a home where that is the done thing? If that family that follows the practice of leaving all shoes at the door, you had better follow suit. Don't even pause to ask 'Should I de-shoe?' Just do it. Presumably their standard of hygiene reflects concern that folks coming in from outside may inadvertently bring in dirt from the street. See? There's a variety of cultural beliefs!

I apologize if I have now caused you anxiety about smells. Don't fret. The whole smell thing is overdone. Just try to be considerate of others. You'll feel self-confident and will score many points.

He made me mad  
To see him shine so brisk and smell so sweet  
*Henry IV, Part 1*, Act 1, Scene 3

## Chapter 25

### Is This the Party to Whom I Am Speaking To?

Fortunately, telephone etiquette is well-established. Here are the rules, cut and dried!

- Answer a phone by saying “Hello.” An accepted variation is “Smith Residence, Greg speaking” or “this is 528-3916.” Any significant variation from that is unacceptable. In particular, never answer by saying, “Yes?” It has an imperious sound.
- The caller should then identify herself. “Hello, honey, this is Auntie Anne,” or “Hello, this is Jessie Moore, may I speak to your mother?” The caller should not say “Hi, it’s me.” Everybody is ‘me.’
- If you are on the receiving end of the call and it is an older relative you should say their name “Hi, Grandpa” and pause to make at least one friendly remark before handing the call over to your parents, “Hi, Grandpa, we just had tandoori chicken for dinner.” Trust me, I’m a grandparent. The grandparent will think you don't like them if you don't say something to them.
- If a person unknown to you has just asked to speak to your father, say “Yes, I’ll go get him for you. Just a minute please,” or “He isn’t home yet, would you like to speak to my mother?”
- If you are home alone, manning the landline, have paper and pen near the phone. You say, “I’m sorry he’s not at home but I’d be happy to take a message.” Then the caller says, “Yes, please ask Ed to phone the warehouse. It’s 572-0051.” To be a really superb message taker you should read it back. “All right, I’ll ask Dad to phone the warehouse at 572-0051.”



Those are the rules when your home phone rings. If you are *making* the call, there is a similar routine, with a few extras. You must first look at the clock. Is it a decent hour to call your friend Sam? And have you made a quick survey of the likelihood of him being at home? You won't please his mother if she has to say "Don't you know Tuesday is Sam's baseball night?"

Once the other person's phone starts to ring you have to decide how many rings to give it. I suggest a maximum 8. Then there is the issue of 'call waiting.' Say you hear the noise that indicates that the friend you are calling is talking on one line but could accommodate you as well. I suggest you hang up and try later instead. Making someone shift between two conversations is insulting.

Let's say your call does get through, and the parent answers. It is sufficient courtesy for you to say "Hello, may I speak to Jamie?" But if you have met Mrs. Shapiro in person it would be even better for you to say "Hello Mrs. Shapiro, this is Neil, may I speak to Jamie?"

Suppose she says "Jamie is at his driver's lesson, can you try him after six-o'clock?" It is then your duty to try to oblige her, rather than offering a counter suggestion such as "Well, could he call me?" Also, you should not ask her to write it down; an adult is not your secretary. Still, if you have information to convey you can try to do so, using a very nice tone of voice: "Mrs. Shapiro, I needed to tell Jamie that our band practice at 8 tomorrow morning is cancelled, and I'm not sure I can call you again. Would you please tell him No Band tomorrow?" She will no doubt be pleased that you have informed her so efficiently.

For cell phones, the relevant etiquette has not been firmed up yet. But you will get it approximately right if you just apply the simple principle of etiquette: 'Be considerate.'

What are the two things about cell phones that cause the most irritation? The fact that the receiver of the call may not be

in a comfortable position to talk, and the fact that the ring tones may distract other people nearby.

In regard to the first, both parties owe etiquette to one another. Whenever I phone someone who may be on the road I first say “Is this a convenient time for you to talk?” By the way, I often say that when calling a landline, too. After the person says, “Yes, it’s fine,” then I no longer need to worry that I am intruding. As with many practices of etiquette it protects *my* dignity as well as the other guy’s.

Typically a caller makes no such prefatory remark but launches into a conversation. It is nevertheless rude for the other person to make the caller feel silly for calling him while he is, say, playing hockey. He should have turned off his phone if he knew a call would be dangerous. Maybe he needed to leave it on for an emergency because his wife is expecting a baby. Well good for him, but he must not make other callers feel unwelcome. *He* must grovel a bit “Scott, would it be okay if I call you back in an hour, I’m tied up.”

Technically one could say that Scott caused a problem by phoning a hockey-player-in-motion. But the caller can’t see what’s at the other end, and you should make him feel the slightest embarrassment. Incidentally, if a call gets through to the bathroom, the person answering should *not* announce that they have been caught on the toilet. It is not fair to make the innocent caller feel like a bathroom-invader.

The other irritation concerns the melody ringing. If you are riding an all-night bus between cities, and it is likely that passengers will hope for some sleep, you should turn your cell phone off or put it on ‘silent’. The sleeper who is awakened by the melody has every right to feel angry with you. You should care for such persons whether you will ever meet them again or not. Why? Because that’s the whole point of etiquette -- social

rules that govern situations in which the lack of rules would breed irritations between individuals. The rules of etiquette eliminate a lot of irritation by heading off the problem: the simple rule here is ‘Shut off your phone.’

Almost as soon as cell phones were invented there came the rule ‘Turn it off before entering the movie theatre, the church, the lecture hall, etc.’ Despite your good intentions, if your phone does ring in a lecture hall, you should *not*, under any circumstances, say ‘Hello.’ You have already angered people by the ringing noise; don’t add a second offense. Moreover, you should soothe everyone’s anger by making some gesture of remorse. Perhaps make an exaggerated grimace, or put your hand over your eyes as if you are ashamed. This sort of self-accusation expiates the crime. Isn’t that nice?

### *Hanging Up*

Never hang up without saying ‘‘Good-bye’’ (or ‘See you later, Sweetheart,’ or whatever sounds right to you). I guarantee that adults will be stunned by your rudeness if you hang up without the standard sign-off. In fact it may take you a long time to restore your credibility with them if you do such a thing!

Even if the other person deserves to be hung up on, you should still say ‘‘Good-bye’’ before putting the phone down. Or if he tries to continue arguing and you just don’t want to be a part of it, say something officious like ‘‘I’m sorry I cannot continue this discussion any further. I must go now. Good-bye.’’ You will come out clean if you say that much, whereas you will not come out with your etiquette reputation intact if you are a hanger-upper.

## *The Expense of Calls*

Be considerate of the other person's phone bill. Sometimes even a call that you place to *her* registers a charge for her to pay. I cannot give instructions to you about this because there are different fee arrangements per each carrier. Just be aware of it and also state your awareness by saying "I'm sorry, I've been chatting away. I forgot that this is costing you a fortune."

If you are the caller, you may also protect yourself well within the rules of etiquette, by saying, "Well, this call is getting expensive so I mustn't continue too long." Be sure you say it in a nice tone and give a bit of notice before then terminating the conversation.

If you need to make a call on someone's line, give them the cash for it straightaway. Don't say, "Shall I pay you a dollar for using your phone?" -- just put it decisively on the table near the phone or into their hand.

Do you not know I am a woman?  
When I think, I must speak.

*As You Like It*, Act 3, Scene 2

## Chapter 26

### Etiquette at School

Education is a precious thing. Many people who do not have access to school would give anything to learn how to read and write and to find out about history and science. Your teachers are precious. In most cases it is accurate to say they have devoted their lives to educating the young.

Recently, teachers have started to queue up for 'retirement packages' at an early age. In my day the teacher, often a maiden lady, stayed on till she was 65 or older, and considered it a very rewarding career. She knew she was an honored person in the community. Today many teachers can't tolerate the 'lip' they get from their charges and feel completely unappreciated.

You can see where this chapter is heading. Etiquette at school consists, in essence, of students showing respect towards the teachers, also towards the principal, the school librarian, the teachers' assistants, the sports coaches, and the groundskeepers. Other chapters have mainly emphasized two-way etiquette. The 'school crisis' is such as to demand that your sense of etiquette at academe be given an upward thrust. You must, plainly and simply, come to have more respect for teachers.

#### *The Top Two Priorities*

Because it has been a long time since I was in school, I asked a few teachers what areas I should emphasize here. Please close your eyes and try to guess what their reply was. A gold-star if you get the top two suggestions right. Go on, please guess.

The most-mentioned area was 'student's tone of voice,' and the next was 'not making way for the teacher.'

At your school, is it a rule to stand back when the teacher is trying to make it down a crowded stairwell between classes? It should be. May I suggest that if no such regulation exists you *conspire* with your classmates to start doing it? One teacher told me, also, that when he and a student reach a doorway at the same moment, the student typically scoots through rather than giving him the right of way. That is simply dreadful.

As for tone-of-voice, I was told by one teacher that when she puts a video on, some student is likely to call out in an insulting voice, “Can you turn it up?” She then has to say, “Excuse me, I’m not your servant and if you want something done you have to say ‘Mrs. Randolph, we can’t hear it. Would it be possible for you to raise the volume?’” But of course there comes a time when she is too weary to answer every offensive tone with a lesson on how to speak pleasantly, and humbly, to one’s teacher.

Quite possibly you think that it is the pupils who are hard done by, and that the teachers, cafeteria staff, security guard, and others, are arrogant and unfair. If your belief is in fact true, it is probably because those adults don’t know how else to act with rude teens. Let me make a suggestion for negotiating with the enemy. Tomorrow, go to the person with whom you are most at odds. Look at her pleasantly and say: “Ms. Dorothy’ (if her badge says ‘Dorothy,’ or ‘Mrs. Jacobs’ if her badge says ‘Mrs. Dorothy Jacobs’), I’m afraid I may have been rude to you last week. I was tired, it won’t happen again.” Note that you don’t even have to eat crow by saying “I apologize” -- it is enough for you to indicate remorse.

I can practically guarantee that the next day Dorothy Jacobs will look at you with new eyes. And if several of your peers conspired to do this over a period of time, the whole relationship may be turned around.

## *Libraries and Lockers*

What does the library have in common with the locker area? Answer: Both are noisy. In libraries it is a major breach of good manners to talk and make or receive a phone call. My favorite library has a sign that says in large print ‘Today is Quiet Day at the Library,’ and in small print, ‘one of 365.’ It is also bad manners to eat or drink (if for no other reason than that this creates noise or olfactory distraction) in the library. Junk should not be left behind and books, if they are to be returned to the shelves, should be returned exactly to the correct place.

In the locker area, noise is certainly okay. The school day has ended and students are entitled to let loose. However, there is no reason for courtesy to go out the window. Pushing and shoving are mean. Preventing others from getting to their lockers is rotten.

And all this courtesy! The strain of man’s bred out  
Into baboon and monkey.

*Timon of Athens*, Act 1, Scene 1`

## Chapter 27

### Checklist for a House Party

Hosting a party at home is a big responsibility. Whether a small group or large, guests must be dealt with according to the traditional rules of hospitality. Consider this checklist:

- Have you put a guest towel and guest soap in your bathroom for the guest's use?
- Have you parked your own car several lengths up the street to make room for guests' cars?
- Have you let them know in advance that they are welcome to park in your driveway?
- Is your phone connected in case anyone is lost *en route* and is trying to call you for instructions?
- Are lights on outside the house to guide them in?
- Have you put away the vacuum cleaner and anything else that obstructs walkways?
- Have you hidden anything that is too personal to be exposed? Have you closed the doors of any room you mean to be off-limits?
- Is there music playing in the background, if you think that would be suitable?
- Have you turned off the radio and the television?
- Have you told others in your household the names and occupations of the guests, and anything about them that they need to know?
- Have you thought of any special needs: so-and-so walks with crutches, so-and-so doesn't eat pork, so-and-so will need to phone home to check on the babysitter?



- Have you written a reminder note to yourself and left it in the cutlery drawer saying “chips and dips, then cold sandwiches, then hot satays,” etc?
- Have you arranged coat-hooks on which to hang the guest’s wraps (not in bedroom closets), and considered that on a rainy day the coats will be wet? Are you ready to tell the guests where to put umbrellas? Have you a welcome mat or a foot scraper in case mud-dragging weather prevails?
- Have you appointed an assistant to keep an eye on refilling the drinks? Is there a sufficiency of ice in the freezer? Is there a corkscrew? Enough glasses? The appropriate type of glasses? Did you remember to clean them to a sparkle?
- Have you thought of a method for signaling the end of the party if it appears that guests don’t know when to depart? Walking around to offer chocolate mints is a possible way. (But if they don’t respond, just endure it cheerfully, till dawn if necessary.)
- Most of all, have you remembered to look as if the whole thing is a breeze (no “I slaved over these stuffed mushrooms” remarks) and to look genuinely pleased to see each individual?

Then don’t worry. You have done your best. If anything ‘awful’ takes place it will not be your fault. The really awful thing, from an etiquette point of view, is for you to have neglected the preparatory steps.

Sweets to the sweet: farewell!  
*Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 1

## Chapter 28

### Mandatory Gift-Giving

Mandatory means ‘you must’ whereas ‘gift’ implies something freely given, so there is a bit of a contradiction in the title of this chapter. What I have in mind is that some occasions are associated with a tradition of gift-offering which is so strong you cannot worm out of it.

You are expected to give a gift on at least these occasions:

- a child’s birthday party
- a shower for a bride-to-be
- a baby shower for a mother-to-be
- a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah (Jewish coming-of-age rite)
- a house warming (when someone gets a new home)
- a wedding *if* you receive a written invitation, regardless of whether you attend.

You must also bring a plate if you have been invited to a bring-a-plate festivity. (Ahem. I assume everyone understands the plate is to have something on it!) This may also be called a pot-luck dinner. Note that the acronym ‘BYO’ on an invitation means bring your own booze. It does not require you to bring booze; it’s simply a signal that the host will not be providing it.

As to *what* you are supposed to give at the mandatory-giving ceremonies, this, too, is somewhat fixed. Obviously a house-warming gift should be house-related, such as a decorative bowl or a plant. Baby showers are for the mother-to-be to receive baby clothes, though if you are a ‘significant other,’ you may be expected to contribute a crib or a stroller. At a bridal

shower the gifts are typically appurtenances for the kitchen and bathroom; towels are always welcome.

Realizing that young readers of this chapter may be waiting with baited breath to hear about the birthday party gift, I'll postpone it for a minute to mention the wedding gift. In the old days, there were certain expected fancy gifts: silver teapots, chinaware, candlesticks. Today many brides sign a Bridal Registry in a local department store: you can phone this store and order one of the suggestions listed by the bride. Even when there is a Registry, though, you are free to choose a different gift.

Many newlyweds count on receiving monetary gifts and this is often the best choice. Note that all wedding gifts are to be sent to the brides' home, even if the groom is your relative.

As for the child's birthday gift, I recommend that the two rules of etiquette are: try to please the child, and don't give anything too expensive. (Sorry, kids.) The point of inviting schoolmates to the party is to create a notable occasion; it is not to send their mothers into a tailspin worrying if their gift will look inferior to others. The gift *should* be 'inferior:' a game, a jersey, in my day a pencil case. One of my friends now gives gift-certificates to all her teen's pals on their birthdays, but this pulls on the family budget. As such it can impinge on the joy of the occasion.

### *What About Money?*

Finally to the subject of mandatory *monetary* offerings. I mentioned that it is considered appropriate to give money for weddings. Money is also often given at graduations, confirmations, and Bar Mitzvahs, perhaps as a signal that the young person is now old enough to manage money.

At birthdays, money is often given by relatives. If it is given in a standard amount it can unfortunately lead to a sense by the child that he is entitled to it each year. I have actually seen

a child give an adult a disapproving look when he got less than the expected amount. So let me mention this painfully obvious rule of etiquette: never, *never*, look disappointed when you open a gift. That's never as in absolutely, 100% never.

Whatever folks gave you was given to you because they were kind enough to bother at all. Their sense of taste may be way off from yours. They may have given you a subscription to a magazine that *they* enjoy. Be flattered. It means they think you have good taste (defined by them, as by everyone, as being similar to their own taste).

In sum, in mandatory-gift situations, when you are the giver, you should follow the convention, or risk a Tsk-tsk.

Some other occasions may be mandatory for gifts, too, if people in your area make a habit of it. I have lived in an area where it is wrong to show up at someone's house empty-handed. For a dinner party, a bottle of wine, chocolates, or flowers are standard. These can be scaled up or down. Thus, a few blooms from your own garden, nicely presented, will do. Wine is the thing if your whole family is invited to a sit-down dinner, or an equivalent substitute if alcohol would be a problem. A home-made thingie, be it a craft or a jar of marmalade, is always a suitable gift for the hostess.

### *Rejecting a Gift*

If someone asks you in advance if you would like such-and-such for a gift, and you wish to say "No," you not only *may* say it, yet *should* say it. After all, that is why they are asking, to avoid spending money on something that will not please you. You can even be extra-diplomatic by saying, "Oh, thank you for asking. No, that's not really the software I generally use...".

Perhaps the gift is already purchased but the giver says, “I’m not sure if you wear cardigans like this, if you don’t, just tell me and I’ll exchange it. I’ve kept the receipt.” Should you tell the truth? Probably. But here you have to sit down with them and make a big show of estimating the trouble to which they will be put. “Mrs. Ramirez, that would mean you would have to go all the way back to the southern mall: it’s asking too much of you.” Mrs. Ramirez will be so pleased at your recognition of her effort that she will be only too happy to trade that ‘retro’ cardigan in for a cutting-edge pullover.

If, however, you receive a gift that is undesired and there is no offer to do a swap, you are pretty much stuck with it. You still have to show your gratitude and at least a modicum of enthusiasm. And there are two further restrictions that go with gift *getting*. The first is that you cannot give it away (unless you can be certain that the giver will never find out). The second is that if it is an item meant for display, you have to display it at least occasionally (a good reason by the way, for *not* giving anyone an item of household décor unless you’ve consulted him first).

The rules against being a rejecter are extremely strong for reasons that you can deduce merely by noting how *you* would feel if someone laughed at or discarded a gift that you had presented.

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!

*Richard III*, Act 5, Scene 4

## Chapter 29

### Right of Weigh

The subject of dress brings us to the subject of fat people. Note, I did not say ‘overweight people’ or ‘full figure gals.’ I said fat people. There is nothing wrong with fat people, so there is no need to employ euphemisms (i.e., word sweeteners).

There are tall people, short people, average people, fat people, etc. Knowing someone’s size does not automatically give you any other information about them. Are short people stupid? Are tall people lazy? Who knows? You have to meet them individually and check them out. Yet some people buy into the assumption that fat people are stupid and lazy.

To find out how absurd this is, imagine that you are of average weight, then imagine that a doctor gives you a pill (for whatever reason) that causes you to gain 7 pounds a week. Ten weeks later you are 70 pounds over your usual weight. So you are fat. Are you lazy and stupid? Are you in any way a less worthy human being than you were ten weeks ago? Of course not.

The reason I state all this brazenly is because I am aware that kids today have some sort of horror of being fat. I know a boy aged 12 who is literally afraid to go to school because the kids call him fat. But you’ve got to see him: he’s a stick figure. No flesh on him at all! I don’t mean he has gone on a mad diet to avoid his schoolmates’ taunts; I mean he was always skinny. Isn’t this bizarre?

That said, etiquette clearly requires that you refrain from making anyone feel bad about his or her size. If you yourself are huge, the etiquette for you to practice is to deal with the silly ones as calmly as possible, don’t bait them into taunting you. In fact I recommend reverse psychology: boast about your weight. Tell them you are trying out for the Guinness Book of Records for

pie eating or say “I weigh more than my two brothers combined.” That will disarm them altogether. Similarly a short boy need only say “Excuse me, has someone got a ladder, I don’t have a good view.” Once you have identified your condition, it is no longer a fun task for them to identify it for you!

*Disclaimer*

Lest it be said that I advocate obesity I had better point out that it is not a choice anyone would sensibly make (had they a choice). The bigger a man is, the harder his heart must work to pump the blood to greater distances. Weight is also a risk factor for diabetes and other health problems. My point has only to do with the bad manners (and illogic) of criticizing a person because he or she is of sumptuous proportions.

That this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew.

*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2

## Chapter 30

### Email, Son of Snail

In my day we had only snail mail, the electronic kind having come into common usage mainly in the 1990s. We didn't consider it snailish. In fact it was nice to have a several-day pause between the outgoing and the incoming letter. In primary school (1950s), we were taught to write a 'bread-and-butter letter.' That's the kind a friend sends to a friend for general exchange of information (at that time, phone calls made beyond the local area were prohibitively expensive).

Young'uns have probably got no background in how to write a standard letter and thus don't realize the ways in which email deviates. Some ways in which it deviates are not particularly relevant to etiquette. For instance, we used to write our return address and today's date at the top, and now these are furnished automatically by the computer.

Still, a typical email today lacks some of the items that courtesy demanded of letters in my day, and for your edification I shall now mention them. Then we can question whether they are worth adhering to or not.

You were supposed to do your best in writing the letter – spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and formatting (i.e., nice margins). If you made a blot, you had to pull out a fresh page and rewrite the whole letter. Even a variation in size of handwriting was a no-no. Point? To let the other person know you respect him (and that you respect yourself).

The letter was to have a formal opening sentence or paragraph of greeting. Let the other person realize that you know he exists. "Dear Joe, Greetings! I hope this reaches you before you are off to camp..." Then it was to have a body. Then at the end, you won't be too surprised: a conclusion. In the conclusion,



as in the greeting, you were to re-establish your contact with the fellow. “Eric, that’s all for now. Let me know when you get your exam marks.”

### *Still Worth the Trouble?*

Now for the debate on whether we need these things. There is currently no established etiquette for email because etiquette implies a slow consolidation of cultural custom and there hasn't yet been time for this to occur. Do you think we should have email etiquette? Let me ask this: have you ever felt hurt when reading an email because you felt your friend did not care enough about you? She just dashed off any old thing as a reply to your message, or perhaps bulk-mailed a letter to you and several pals?

If ‘Yes,’ then we need etiquette. That is a main purpose of etiquette after all, to try to chop out those natural-enough behaviors that cause hurt to others. The writer of the aforementioned email was thinking only of herself, particularly her convenience. She knew a way to save time and, understandably, she used it. But at your expense! If she is to do better in future, she will need some rules.

I think we should maintain the old rule about doing a good job. Yes it’s easy for fingers to slip on the keyboard and cause a misspelled word, but who said you can’t take time to fix it? You should take the time as it lets the other person know you care.

As for the old rule about having a greeting and a conclusion, I am willing to compromise. These are not needed as such but what continues to be needed is a sense of connection between the writer and the reader. The ‘tone of voice’ of an email can indicate that the sender is courteous and caring. So the rule is: emails are not exempt from basic standards of correspondence. I think they should also have a clearly visible

signature, appearing on a line by itself, unless you know the other person agrees to informality. I sign my initials to close friends.

As for sending in bulk, this should only be done if it is announced. A friend of mine writes ‘Dear All.’ That way we know for one thing, to our great relief: that she is not champing at the bit for our reply in the way the sender of a sole message might be. It also tells us that she is sending out information of general interest (usually about current movies, her specialty).

Hence, a rule that I think worthy of taking up is: No bulk mailing without saying so. Picture yourself getting a letter from a friend “I need to make scones for the meeting tomorrow and I don’t know how. Do you have a recipe?” If it is to you alone, you should help her – or reply that you don’t have a recipe. But if you suspect that she has bulk-mailed it, why waste your effort?

### *Crying Out Loud*

I recently read in a British newspaper that a teacher received an essay assignment from a student in the language of instant messaging! She felt that she had to fail the student. I agree, she did the person a favor by making him wake up to the fact that his little teenage world is not the whole world. The aim of this section in this chapter on letter writing is to warn the younger generation about the current trend of *reducing* language.

This reduction is partly a matter of convenience: instant messaging wouldn’t be instant if one had to write a dissertation to say ‘got to go’ when you could instead say GTG. I have no quarrel with the use of shorthand: COL for ‘crying out loud,’ LMAO for ‘laughing my arm off’ (so to speak), or BRB for ‘be right back.’ Nor do I want to fight the marvellous new technologies of communication. But human language is a rich, subtle thing and at the very least you need to acquire a vocabulary if you want to be able to think complex thoughts.

So please be aware that you are not being clever if you reduce your language. Granted, Shakespeare said “Brevity is the soul of wit,” but he meant this in cases where there was some wit present in the first place. Succinctness, i.e., the use of minimal verbiage, can make a clever remark even more clever, but it can’t upgrade a feeble idea to a sharp one. It can’t endow a vacuous remark with wit.

I go further. I ask you to take note of whether this fashion is being pressed upon you for commercial reasons. I’ve just leafed through (sorry, scrolled down) a few teen websites and found a very high representation of these five words: *freaky*, *nerd*, *cool*, *wannabe*, and *babes*.

It doesn’t take too much genius on the part of an adult to see that the writers are telling the teen how to categorize everything in a simple way. Then, when a seller wants to sell you something, he need only invoke one of those quick guide words. Talk about low-cost control of youth! You have to admire their skill.

He hath not fed of the dainties that are bred in a book;  
He hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink.

*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Act 4, Scene 2.

## Chapter 31

### It Happens (Foul Language)

We used to have a joke:

*Grandmother:* Zachary, there are two words I want you never to use. One is swell and the other is lousy.

*Zachary:* All right, what are the two words?

Oh, OK. So Grandma is old-fashioned. In regard to today's language, we all know what constitutes foul language, namely four-letter-words. Since I wouldn't dare print the two main offenders here let us call them '*snit*' and '*blukt*.'

Is the rule of etiquette 'Never say *snit* or *blukt*?' No, it isn't, although I recommend it as a rule of thumb. If you get yourself into the habit of excising such words from your vocabulary you will almost certainly enhance your reputation.

The rule of etiquette is to avoid using foul language where it could give offense. Say you are riding in a car with your brother and you know for sure that words like *snit* and *blukt* do not offend him in the slightest. Say the window is rolled up and you feel like emitting a few colorful words. I believe this is OK from an etiquette point of view (though note what I said above about making it a rule of thumb to avoid these words -- using them freely with Bro means you may inadvertently use them at school and get in trouble).

Now let's say you are at a card table with four other people, three of whom you know to be big users of the word *snit* but you're not sure about the fourth person. What's the rule? The rule is: don't say *snit*.

What if you are sure about all four, but the card table is at a public place and people at the next table can hear you?

Then you must suppress the *snits* (not to mention the *blukts*). Those people are your ‘neighbors,’ at least for the moment, so you owe them courtesy.

What if there is no neighboring table but an occasional passer-by? The rule of etiquette is: do not subject the passer-by to possible offense of his senses. You wouldn’t open a bottle of skunk fragrance as he walked by, would you?

I am afraid to be hypocritical in this book and nominate a standard that most people, including myself, don’t keep. That won’t be a useful guide for anyone. Still, you can do your best to follow the simple logic of this etiquette: Don’t give offense.

If I chance to talk a little wild, forgive me;  
I had it from my father.

*Henry VIII*, Act 1, Scene 4

## Chapter 32

### Age, Money, Party, Sex

People are curious as to other persons' age and wealth, their political Party affiliation (maybe), and their sex (definitely). The title of this chapter is, admittedly, a "bait and switch" tactic. We won't be discussing those four things here, except to state what the etiquette rule is. The overall etiquette rule is: Stifle your curiosity. Never inquire directly. Uphold the barrier of privacy.

#### *Age and Money*

As regards one's age or wealth, it's natural for everyone to try to project their best image. It may help to look older (or younger) than one really is, and it often helps to look more financially fit than one is. Your duty is to respect their wishes (unless you're an accountant asking the client to state his income.) Trust me, you will be reputed as very impolite if you get noseey.

Should you be just dying to know, I suppose you could solicit information obliquely. "I hope the pay is excellent for engineers." At that point, the engineer might reply "Yes, it is." You'd be wise to interpret that as "Yes, and I'm not here to discuss my salary, so shut up."

For age, you could use a side door: "Where were you when JFK was assassinated?" The person might say "Huh? That was 1963, I had to wait another 40 years to be born." OK, you have now learned that she is a 2003 baby. Just don't say "Gotcha!"

Never ask a person what their rent is. Look it up on Zillow. If you try to come in sideways "My pal lives a few blocks from here and pays an exorbitant rent," an appropriate reply from your quarry would be "These barbecue potato chips are delicious."

## *Party Time*

I am on the fence here, due to the swiftly changing times. In my day (basically the Stone Age), no American would ask another to identify his Party. Probably that was related to the near-sacredness of the secret ballot. Namely, you couldn't get punished for voting the wrong way, as who was to know?

On Social Media, people have started to criticize each other harshly for any position they take on political or ideological matters. The whole tenor of courtesy is thereby getting wiped out. So I urge you to stick to the old rule "Don't attack." (But you may attack me on that, K?)

## *Sex, Gender, etc.*

You won't believe me when I say that in my youth it was a crime to be gay. Then it became "not a crime, but sill unmentionable." Since 2004, the right to same-sex marriage has been properly established. Hooray, but let him or her bring it up. "Hi. I'm LGBT." is fine, coming from someone who wishes to state their sexual preferences. But follow the general etiquette rule which is to respect the other person's privacy.

(Note: the privacy of sex has inherent value. One of life's finest gifts is the sexual bond, and it is partly constructed by the very exclusivity and intimacy of the partnership. If it hasn't happened to you yet, just wait. Some day you will be knocked over by it.)

Now for gender, which is a separate matter. Generally, a person can be anything he wants to be. He can overcome any actual handicaps and he can put paid to the labels he may have got stuck with (e.g., poor, untalented). In very recent times this has been expanded to mean "Whichever gender you are, by

anatomy, is small beer. Each person may establish a gender identity based completely on choice."

Q. What's the etiquette here? A. It hasn't been established yet! Still, recall the theme of this book: rules of etiquette suit the typical wishes of people, per the Golden Rule "Do unto others as you wish them to do to you." As the gender issue does cause some brawls, I recommend you stay out of the brawls. But you can rely on the general rule of respecting a person's preferences. Let her say "My preferred pronouns are...."

As for persons who have bodily transitioned from male to female, or vice versa, the rule should be: Signal your genuine acceptance of their new status. Be happy for them. Be respectful.

#### *When You Are the Invadee*

Is there an etiquette rule as to what you should do when another person invades YOUR privacy? Yes, there is an etiquette rule ('How to be a gentleman') for everything. If someone asks you a question they shouldn't ask, just say, with a smile, "I prefer not to divulge." Or "My weight is one of my don't-tell things."

Don't respond with "You rotten little Nosey Parker." Sure, it may be warranted, but it's not gentlemanly. On the other hand, if you are desperate to tell the person that you dislike their breach of privacy, you can always opine, "These barbecue potato chips are AB-SO-LUTE-LY delicious."

Bottom line: privacy is a real value that deserves everyone's protection.

My salad days when I was green in judgment.  
*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 2, Scene 5



## Chapter 33

### Sleepovers Writ Large

At your age, being someone's houseguest usually means a one-night sleepover. This is a relatively painless ordeal for the head of the household. 'Entertainment' is almost entirely taken care of by the fact that the kids entertain each other till 2:00am with gossip or videos. 'Cuisine' is bottom-of-the-line and something that can be delivered hot to the door. 'Transport' is usually gladly provided by the Momsies who have just gained a night off at the hostess's expense.

This chapter is about *real* houseguests. Its purpose is to let you know what an enormous investment someone makes in you if they have you as a week-long (or longer) houseguest. Thus, for etiquette purposes, I hope you will be inspired to thank the hostess profusely if she has invited you. I also hope this chapter will intimidate you from having the nerve ('the utter gall,' the 'unmitigated cheek') to invite yourself to be someone's houseguest.

Why not grab a piece of scrap paper and write down what you think your parents would start doing to prepare for a week-long visit from Lee, an out-of-town friend of yours? Go on, try to think how many tasks are involved. Don't quit until you've managed at least ten.

Got ten yet? Here is my list. Your parents would first of all look into train/bus schedules for Lee. They would confer with Lee's mother as to the mother's wishes on restrictions. They would check on Lee's favorite foods. They might borrow an extra bed, or re-shuffle the members of the household into different beds to make room for Lee.

Two days before the visit they would shop and stock the refrigerator. The day before, they would scrub the bathroom and glance at the newspaper for entertainment ads.

On the day, they would awake to an alarm clock and get into a bit of a flap over meeting Lee's train or bus on time. They'd ask for Lee's preference: a rest upon arrival or a mad dash into activity, such as swimming. Having now inquired and learned that Lee has not previously been to a circus, they could now order tickets for the circus.

### *You As Houseguest*

I'm up to ten tasks already and Lee has only been in the house for an hour. I shan't continue, other than to say that having a guest is a big responsibility. It takes a lot of energy (and probably some financial outlay). You should therefore be aware, if *you* are a guest, that you owe your hostess a great deal. And what does she want as repayment? She wants to see you really getting a lot out of the experience. So if there's a game you've never played before, let her know that you are tickled "I had no idea I'd be good at ping-pong, wait till I tell my brother."

She also wishes in her heart of hearts that you would be kind enough to offer her some favor. How about saying "Mrs. Dimitrious, while I'm sitting here watching TV, I'd be glad to sew buttons on for you. Or do you have any brass that needs polishing?" However, you should not go ahead and fix something that you notice is broken, much less clean an area of encrusted dirt, as it would be interpreted, accurately, as a criticism of her housekeeping.

Also, as a houseguest you need to be alert for the family's patterns of behavior. Don't sit in the father's favorite chair. Go out of your way to mention that it won't bother you at all if one family member has to open the garage (next to your room) at

6:30am. In fact you should openly canvass the fact that you may be causing inconvenience “Do tell me if my snoring gets bad.” They will love you for this.

Err on the side of diffidence if you are not sure where the line is drawn between residents and guests. Thus, don’t enter a room that hasn’t been clearly opened to you, and don’t go wandering into the host’s attic or shed. The host should always tell a houseguest that she is free to open the refrigerator at any time to get a drink. If the host forgets, the guest can ask in a friendly way “If I need a glass of juice after everyone is asleep, is it all right if I go to the fridge?”

Once you get home, it is mandatory for you to write the traditional letter of thanks. “Dear Mrs. Dimitrious” (yes, you write to the mother, if there is one, not to your pal and not to the mother-and-father combined), “This is to thank you for my wonderful week at your home. I realize you went to a heap of trouble for me, especially when I got sick at the circus ...,” etc.

One more idea about house-guest etiquette. I mentioned ‘sleepovers at your age,’ meaning group sleepovers. But if you have just *one* friend overnight, that person is not supposed to sleep on the floor while you are high in your bed. Rather, the opposite. You, the host, take the less comfortable spot and give the guest the bed.

I’m not kidding, that’s the way it is done. And everybody knows that’s the way it is done.

This will last out a night in Russia,  
When nights are longest there.

***Measure for Measure***, Act 2, Scene 1

## Chapter 34

### Fish Fork Aficionados

I'm sure young people would never breach this strict rule of etiquette: *pass the port to the left*. That is because you won't be drinking port, or any of the liqueurs that are served in small quantities as after-dinner drinks. There are many rules of etiquette you simply don't need to know just yet.

The point of this chapter is to state the fact that this book is only an incomplete guide. For those who are turned on by this subject, there are plenty of books at the library or bookshop that can take you into the fine points of passing the port to the left, and replacing the meat fork with a fish fork in the table setting when you are serving fish.

I do not practice these fine points of etiquette myself. I provide only meat forks even when serving fish. My own prejudice, as you may have surmised, is to favor those rules of etiquette that have to do with protecting people's feelings, and the rules that make daily life predictable. But if you like, there is a whole etiquette-land out there where you can sharpen your skills at cultured refinement.

Many 'fish fork' rules are from a bygone day and can no longer apply because the situation no longer arises. I recall reading a guide for houseguests that said "Put your shoes outside your room at night so the servant can polish them." I'm quite sure I'll get through the rest of my life without any occasion at which I'm staying at a house that has a nocturnal shoe-polisher.

Some old-fashioned good ideas, however, are adaptable. In an earlier chapter, I mentioned invitations that used to say 'Carriages at Nine.' No one is going to send a horse and buggy nowadays but it still is helpful for invitations to give a rough idea of when the evening is supposed to end.

*Things a Teenager Can Postpone Worrying About*

Various rules of etiquette may pop into your life later. Here is a random assortment:

- When invited into a formal dining room, stand behind your chair until you are invited to sit down.
- When an Asian businessman offers you his business card, you must use both your hands in accepting it, and treat it with awe.
- To set up a stage for a speaker at a podium, put the national flag at the audience's left, other flags to the right.
- When you ask Joe Blow to hand-deliver a letter to Mary Doe, write on the bottom-left corner of the envelope 'Kindness of Joe Blow.'
- When putting on a gala for charity, convey information in the invitation as to the tax-deductibility of donations.
- Don't wear white accessories after Labor Day.
- Never put literature on the table in a fine restaurant, whether a novel or a business contract.
- When signing a letter, put your title in parentheses, if at all. For example, (Mrs.) Jodi Downs, (Rev) Anne Beck.

And don't forget to send out birth announcements when your baby is born!

But if it be a sin to covet honor  
I am the most offending soul alive.

***Henry V***, Act 4, Scene 3

## Chapter 35

### Hi, 'Bye, and Smalltalk

How should one say Hello? What are we to call the person after saying Hello? The *maitre d'* at my favorite Spanish restaurant greets a woman and her young daughter by saying in such musical tones, Senioooooora, Senoriiiiita. Imagine if he had to say 'Madam, Miss.' The English language just hasn't got the words for a warm greeting.

It also lacks the means of distinguishing the closeness of *you* as the Germans do with *du* and *sie*, or the French do with *tu* and *vous*. In Germany it would be shocking to hear an adult addressed as 'du' by a child. But English-speaking children call both their playmate and their Prime Minister 'you.'

In any case, there are some rules and they must be obeyed. First, as to the choice between Hi and Hello, err on the side of caution and say "Hello" if there is any issue of hierarchy. (For example: which would you use to greet a prospective employer at a job interview? Very good.)

#### *Titles*

As for what to *call* the person, err on the side of formality if you are unsure. Where you know the man's surname, Oglethorp, call him Mr. Oglethorp. Where you don't know, 'Sir' will do for any adult male, except maybe a priest in his robes. For clergypersons there are many different titles, but if you don't know I'd go for 'Reverend' or 'Father.' For an Anglican archbishop the title 'Archbishop' would be fine, and, 'Father' would be perfectly acceptable also (although in formal settings he is called 'Your Grace').

For females the choice is not so clear. The all-purpose equivalent to 'Sir,' namely 'Madam' or 'Ma'am,' does not always

sound right. Still, you won't be faulted for using it. The accent is on the first syllable in Madam – *Madam*. (To help remember that, think of her being *mad*). If, instead, you pronounce it 'Madam' you are using the French word, Madame, of which the plural is Mesdames.

When you know the surname, there is still a problem since 'Mr.' has three counterparts: 'Miss,' 'Ms.,' and 'Mrs.' I believe you cannot be faulted for using 'Ms.' It is true that some unmarried women prefer Miss to Ms. but if you have not heard tell their preference you can try Ms. Likewise, some married women want to hear the sound of 'Mrs.' rather than 'Ms.' Naturally, once a lady has told you that, it is not proper of you to override her choice.

### *Roles*

Here's a tricky question: Judge John Smith lives in your apartment building. On a Sunday morning he gets into your elevator, wearing shorts. Do you say "Hello, Mr. Smith," or "Hello, Your Honor," or just "Hello." Answer: None of the above. You should say "Hello, Judge." The 'Your Honor' bit is reserved for Court. In the courtroom it is important that the public forget that John is just a flesh-and-blood man, and imagine him to be the voice of the law. In the elevator, however, there is no call for this mental imagery.

Some roles have direct titles. You should say 'Driver' when speaking to a taxi driver or bus driver. It's proper to say 'Postman' (Postperson?) and 'Waiter,' so I suppose it is all right to say any other occupational names though I have never actually heard anyone say 'Butcher' or 'Plumber.' For some reason we attach 'Mr.' to some roles. 'Mr. Butcher' sounds better than 'Butcher,' yet 'Teacher' sounds better than 'Mrs. Teacher.' I don't wish to create any anxiety where it did not previously exist; the point is simply to note that English is a bit peculiar in this area. Just try to sound polite -- "do your thing," and it will be accepted.

One rule that you should stick to is this: never call adults by their first name unless they've invited you to. And if David or Christopher does invite you to, don't shorten it to Dave or Chris without a further invitation to do so.

### *Good-bye*

As for the word of parting, *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives *good-by* as the first spelling and *good-bye* as the second. It states the origin of the word as a contraction of 'God be with you.' Hence it is like *adios* in Spanish, which derives from the French *adieu*, meaning 'I commend you to God.'

'Bye is the common abbreviation for good-bye. It's acceptable for *informal* occasions. However, because 'bye is very short, it is usually padded, to "bye now" or "bye. Take care.'

*Bye-bye* may be considered too informal outside of the family circle. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 'Bye-bye' comes from baby talk for good-bye. (It is frowned upon when a secretary is ending a business telephone call.)

To make the word for departure more than one syllable, one can opt for 'Farewell' although that may connote too much finality. The French *à bientôt*, pronounced 'ah bee *en* toe,' means 'until soon,' and thus sounds sweeter. Personally, I think that we should one day adopt the Japanese method of parting, which has no match for poignancy, namely, to bow from the waist.

### *In Between the Hi and the 'Bye*

What goes on between the Hi and the 'Bye? It is considered both warm and respectful to linger a bit longer than 'Hello' when you meet a friend. No need to be a great conversationalist. You'd be amazed at how many people use the weather as their main topic. "Wasn't it awful, that rain we had?" or "Magnificent day today!" This is good etiquette.



There are a few don'ts. You are never supposed to put the person or his family members down, or criticize him directly (such as by correcting his grammar), or compare his actions or his possessions in an unfavorable light to someone else's. You shouldn't brag, but reporting a recent achievement is positively OK. If you've won an award, why not share your joy?

Don't rush in where angels fear to tread, namely, on the subject of a person's religion or his membership in any kind of group. If a person does that to you in an offensive way, etiquette does not oblige you to take it lying down, though common sense suggests that you not escalate the hostilities. You might try responding with "I must have heard you wrong," or "I'm sure you don't mean that," which is often sufficient to convey the we-are-not-amused message.

Body language is an important part of conversation. On the forbidden list are: pointing to a person with the finger (any finger), and staring. Also, you must not appear bored. It's not for nothing that *etiquette* has been defined as 'learning to yawn with your mouth closed.' Even if you are the shyest person on Earth, you must try to keep some eye contact with your conversation partner, as it is truly bad manners to look inattentive.

Interrupting is fine, if you do it politely. This means two things: saying "May I interrupt?" and choosing a moment other than when the person is talking about something he considers vital. Trying to get an incessant talker to wind down is also within the scope of good etiquette, as long as it is not hurtful.

Good night, good night! parting is such sweet sorrow  
That I shall say goodnight till it be morrow.  
*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2

## Chapter 36

### Chivalry Is Not Yet Dead

Has there ever been a gallant person who was not loved and admired? Has there ever been a thoroughgoing gentleman who was not appreciated for his gentlemanly qualities? I'll bet not. So have no fear about practicing chivalry, the qualities of a gallant gentleman. Chivalry is not yet dead and will never disappear.

What does the chivalrous person do? She holds the staircase door open for the person coming down behind her. She doesn't reach into the bag of mixed doughnuts until others have had their choice. He remembers people's birthdays and anniversaries. He offers to carry parcels that someone is struggling with. A chivalrous person is helpful and self-restrained. Rather than wanting to put himself or herself first, the chivalrous person *wants* to be second, or even tenth.

Chivalry was an ideal of etiquette in the thirteenth century and had something to do with war, horses, troubadours, and platonic love. Today the word chivalry means 'very good etiquette.' Not in the sense of details of elegance (see the chapter entitled Fish Forks Aficionados), but doing etiquette with a flourish and with depth of sincerity as described in the chapter on Cultivating Your Warmth.

Thus a chivalrous person is already outstanding in some of the topics already covered in this book: table manners, conformity to a dress code, good posture, and the sending of thank-you notes. To put it another way, a chivalrous person is not a slob, a complainer, a gossip, or a person who wears clothes that cry out for laundering.

Yet there is more to it. The gentleman *protects* women. Or in this equality-conscious age, the gentleperson *protects* others. He

or she is on duty for society. This in itself is gallantry, and it is reasonable to assume that gallantry will also be associated with honesty and steadfastness.

To go any further with this discussion would be to go outside the subject matter of manners. It has to do with aiming for greatness. Interested? Then go to your local library and ask the librarian to direct you to the section on biography. (In the Dewey Decimal System, biographies are located at number 92). There you will find the lives of great people (skip the celebrities) of which any two or three could personally inspire you to greatness.

Here are some synonyms for *chivalry* and *chivalrous* as provided by *Roget's Thesaurus*:

prowess, heroism, manliness, pluck, mettle, girt, virtue, intrepidity, contempt of danger, courtesy, gallantry; good mannered, of gentle breeding, tactful, neighborly.

But remember: you can start your chivalry and your greatness today merely by not being first to reach into the bag of mixed doughnuts....

The man that hath a tongue, I say is no man,  
If with his tongue he cannot win a woman.

*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act 3, Scene 1

## Chapter 37

### How To ‘Rectify’ Your Siblings

Why do I get the feeling that readers have come straight to this spot, leapfrogging all the previous chapters? Perhaps because there seems to be a sibling crisis abroad these days.

#### *Pigs and Computers*

Sibling rivalry is normal and natural. It has been found to exist in all human societies and in many animal species. All offspring compete for the same resource, that being, in the first instance, the mother’s milk. In pigs there is sometimes a litter of thirteen but the sow has only twelve teats (nipples). Each piglet had better fight for feeding time or one of them must die.

In contemporary Western society, the fight in human families is not so much over teats as over access to the computer. Probably the child who loses out will not die, but you’d be forgiven for thinking she would, based on the decibel level of the fighting.

On television sitcoms and teen soap operas, art reflects life. (Or could it be that life is reflecting this very art?) The sisters and brothers plot mayhem against one another and no parent steps in. In these shows, no one explains to the kids that natural though sibling rivalry may be, the authority figure in the family traditionally takes charge and sorts it out. No one offers the fighters a vision of a better deal, in which love instead of hate prevails.

#### *The Confucian Ethic of the Family*

Confucius had a vision. He lived at a time of social unrest, the ‘spring and autumn’ period when many of the Chinese states

were warring. As recorded in *The Analects*, he believed that social harmony could be achieved in connection with the overall harmony of the universe, which is based on a balance of *yin* and *yang*.

Confucius proposed that a man could live well by taking care of five relationships: father-son, husband-wife, older child-younger child, friend-friend, and ruler-ruled. The type of relationship those persons have is one of duty, not rights, toward one another, though the duty has reciprocity.

In general, the older members of the family have more duties of responsibility while younger ones have a duty of reverence.

Chinese are famous for the priority they give to filial devotion: elders are to be respected and cared for at all costs. Not too many Westerners know about the sibling bit. The older kids should help the younger ones and the younger should play the role their age demands: that of looking to the older ones for wisdom. (Yep.) Each must be respectful of the other.

The goal of the Confucian philosophy has to do with self-mastery. This is made possible by a force called *jen*, which means goodness. By practicing such things as truthfulness, diligence, and generosity, one can become a true man (or, as we would say today, a true human). Interestingly, Confucius said that we should help others with their *jen*. Thus, a younger brother can help his older brother by reminding him of his duties. Well isn't that amazing.

In *The Great Learning* it is written that people who wish to set their country right must first set their family right. And the people who wish to make their family right should work on their own heart, and must make their wills sincere.

## *The Rectification of Names*

I suspect that you are thinking that this is all well and good but how can I get Bro or Sis to fall in with it? Easy, or at least easy in the same way that Confucius thought that it would be 'easy' to make the king co-operate: by rectifying his name. If a king oppressed his people (when he should instead have acted in a fatherly way for their welfare), he could no longer be called King.

If your older sibling doesn't care for you, he or she should no longer be called older sibling. The relevant phrase to spout is "The beginning of all wisdom is to call things by their right names." I can't guarantee success with the rostering of the home computer, but it's worth a try!

## *A Word about Opioids*

Ancient theories of the cosmos (such as the yin-yang theory) are outstripped by modern science. The *jen* that goes around making people be good is now able to be studied under a microscope. It has to do with brain chemistry. People (and members of mammalian and bird species) are motivated to be altruistic in certain predictable circumstances. The most predictable of all is that a mother will look after her young.

The chemistry in a female bird's brain can be broken down finely enough for scientists to see that a hen deprived, experimentally, of a certain chemical called oxytocin will lose its maternal altruism. It won't feed the chicks. The human mother also has an observable brain function that uses oxytocin. This is an opioid, that is, a pleasure-giving substance, that stimulates such actions as getting up willingly to give the baby its 2:00am feeding.

I shant go into detail here (you can ask a librarian how to research these things). The point is that there really is a *jen* and

not just for mothers but for all family members. Siblings do love each other; typically in later life they become the closest of friends -- mark my words.

This *jen* needs to be stimulated by positive talk (at least its opposite, hostility, needs to be deliberately decreased). Finally, love is also cultivated by time spent together and by physical contact. An arm around the shoulder of a parent or sibling can't do you any harm.

### *Etiquette at Home*

To get back to the subject of etiquette (were we ever far from it?) it is absolutely, no exceptions, required that young people show respect towards their parents. And parents need to help the children to love one another. This is how it has been for all time and there is no new way to do it. I have recently witnessed teenage girls screaming abuse at their parents. And I heard on the grapevine about a boy who slaps his mother. Fathom it, assaulting the person who bore you! Please believe me when I say this a temporary trend that needs to be given the flick immediately if not sooner.

I must be cruel only to be kind.

*Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 1

## Chapter 38

### Your Secret Is Safe with Me

In recent decades there have been major assaults on our privacy. Newspapers publish in detail the sex lives of famous people. Marketing firms sell personal information about all of us. Governments conduct illegal wiretaps and maintain dossiers on many citizens. Your generation would be forgiven for thinking that this is routine and that there is no such thing as a right to privacy.

But you *do* have a right to privacy and others must respect it. Must? Others *must* do that? Are they legally obliged? No. Here is where etiquette comes in. The rules against invading a person's privacy are a matter of 'socially agreed' constraints. It is considered decent and correct to keep tight-lipped about information that another person has confided in you. Let's deal with that issue first, and then discuss more generally the value of privacy.

#### *In Confidence*

Can you think of contexts in which it is your duty not to reveal something that you know. One is, naturally, when someone has sworn you to secrecy, or when, in an urgent moment, they have had to reveal to you something that you automatically know is to be kept secret. The duty of silence imposed on you here is not strictly a matter of etiquette; it is a matter of honor, like the keeping of a promise.

Also, you have to stay silent when you glean information about people at the place where you are employed. If you work in a bank and learn who has the millions, or who has a joint account with a lover, it is not for you to pass that on to anyone. (Indeed your employment contract may have specified a



requirement not to divulge any privileged information.) Similarly, but as a matter of honor rather than a firm rule, if a friend asks you to type her résumé, and therein you discover an intriguing tidbit about her past, you must proceed as if you hadn't seen it. This is because you were 'working for' her.

Here's a concept that *is* specifically a rule of etiquette. Namely, if you chance to see something in a person's home, when you are a guest, you should not tell others about it if it is of a personal nature. For instance, you see a medicine bottle in a friend's bathroom that tells you she has such-and-such illness. Of course this rule does not include items displayed in the front hall such as a Certificate of Membership in the music guild, or a trophy on the mantelpiece proclaiming that so-and-so won at golf in 1985.

It does cover the state of their housekeeping. I'm sure you will find it irresistible to go home from a dinner at your friend's and tell your mother that Mrs. B has got dirty dishes piled up to the ceiling. That is all right, but don't tell your friend's friends at school. Have some discretion. Your role as guest carries an obligation of loyalty.

### *Privacy*

I believe the desire for privacy is built into human nature. We simply *feel* the need to shelter part of our lives from inspection by others. You have a right to keep a secret diary (though how you police its secrecy is your responsibility). You have a right not to answer friends' questions about your family members' problems. You have a right to modesty in the dressing room at the gym.

Etiquette is not the law and cannot protect you if someone 'offends.' Rather, etiquette tells *you* not to offend. So don't interfere with other people's right to be exactly as private as they wish to be. Have you ever felt bad about seeing someone

talk about you on Facebook? You have my permission to tell them they have invaded your space! Article 12 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) says "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence..."

### *The 'Dob Not' Rule*

To 'dob someone in' means to tattle on them, as in "I saw Janice smoking behind the shed." It is generally considered bad form to do this. In Australia if you dob someone in you may become known as a 'dobber'; a label that tends to stick for life. Still, there are exceptions to the dob-not rule. Janice's smoking harms only Janice, but someone's theft of computers from the school will harm a lot of people. You are not required to protect a thief.

Most importantly, you should dob bullies. A bully works by terrorizing individuals individually. If they ganged upon him, instead of individually putting up with him, he would soon be out of business. In a comparable situation in the adult world (and there are plenty of bullies there!), I would advise the victims to gang up. In schools, however, the 'ganging up' has to be done by the authorities, who can wield their superior power.

For the authorities to be made aware of the bullying you may have to do some fancy footwork of anonymous reporting. For instance you can protect yourself by telling the teacher that 'a friend' of yours would like to report the bullying behavior of a 'certain person' but she is 'too scared to come forth.' It would take a pretty dense teacher to miss the point of what you are saying.

### *Privacy of Electronic Communications*

Etiquette requires you not only to guard the spoken words of your friends, but also to guard their electronic communications

against unintended broadcast, and to take care with your own communications if they contain ‘the dirt’ on another person. Accidents happen all the time in cyberspace and a message you send to Laura may end up being read by Lauren. It is also possible that Laura’s email is technically owned by her employer and that he has a habit of reading his employees’ emails.

Although this field of etiquette is still under construction, I think you will see the sense of the following rules:

- If you use a speakerphone, let the person on the other end of the phone line know immediately that his words can be heard throughout the room. This warns him not to speak of intimate or sensitive matters.
- If you send bulk emails, use ‘blind carbon copy’ (BCC) so that each person does not learn the email address of the other recipients.
- When standing near a friend who is typing his ‘PIN’ into an automated teller machine, make a conspicuous gesture of turning the other way.
- Ditto for passwords on a computer keyboard. If the friend asks you to turn away this will create awkwardness for both of you.

But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison house  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood.

*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5

## Chapter 39

### Etiquette Toward the Environment

When my sister and I, at the age of about 6 and 8, went out for a ride in Dad's car, we used to love to throw a candy-bar wrapper out the back window. At high speed it made an interesting 'thwap' sound when the wind took it. Though I may experience more than a twinge of retroactive guilt, there was no guilt at the time. We thought that the open-air was endless and failed to realize that our junk would actually land somewhere.

Times have changed and now everybody realizes that junk does land somewhere. The concept of 'litter' has been around long enough to make its way into the rules of etiquette. The rule is, of course: don't litter. Or, as the signs in some picnic grounds in England say: "Please take your rubbish with you when leaving."

Yet the title of this chapter hints at something more ambitious and more abstract than that. I mean it to imply that we should respect the environment, treating it with courtesy the way we treat people with courtesy, a concept well known in Buddhism.

You know that the 'infrastructure' of life, such as rainfall and its evaporation, or the input of solar energy, which needs to be limited by the ozone, is endangered by human activities. Does this not suggest to you certain rules for etiquette about acting with deference to those systems of infrastructure?

And then there is the matter of our disproportionate share of resource-use. Soon after I got my driver's license I recall asking Dad for the keys to the car so I could go buy an ice-cream.

The same Dad who let me go ‘thwap’ now said (ten years later), “You don’t mean you’re going to carry two tons of metal (the car) around the block to get one ice-cream?” I’m happy to say that since that moment I have always questioned the worthiness of my use of gasoline for each particular jaunt.

To use resources unnecessarily, especially water, nowadays seems to qualify not only as a moral issue but as a rule of etiquette: don’t waste. A person who visibly lets the tap water run too long appears to lack decorum as much as someone who uses bad language.

Where the bee sucks, there suck I;  
In a cowslip bell I lie;  
There I couch when owls do cry.  
On the bat’s back I do fly.

*The Tempest*, Act 5, Scene 5

## Chapter 40

### Recapitulation

It may seem that a lot has been covered in these pages and that you'd be hard pressed to remember it all. What are the essential bits? The practices of chivalry and of gushing are only for those whose nature lends itself to such things. The fish-fork level of etiquette is only pursued by a few, and the etiquette towards the environment is an as-yet-undeveloped ideal.

A few chapters laid down the law. Mandatory gifts are, well, mandatory. Protocol at the podium or elsewhere is never to be deviated from. Weddings and funerals are complicated ceremonies that have professional staffs to prepare them, so you need only follow the cues given in the ceremony itself.

Other chapters covered in detail a range of things that come into your life on a regular basis, but even these can be sorted out and simplified. Let's put them into six categories: personal appearance, communication skills, behavior in public, hospitality, etiquette exclusive to the role of 'kid,' and the most frequently occurring one, personal interactions.

#### *Personal Appearance*

The chapters relevant to personal appearance were those on the dress code, personal hygiene, posture, foul language, and being on time. While 'foul language' is auditory rather than visual, I think it alters your appearance. Punctuality, too, is a "How do I look" thing. Arriving late looks a bit like wearing a shirt with a food stain on it. Come to think of it, personal hygiene includes smell, so, in all, 'personal appearance' means how you strike the senses of the other person: their eyes, their ears, and their nose.

To sum up the miscellaneous rules of etiquette in this first category: Make a nice appearance.

### *Communication Skills*

The main areas discussed in regard to communicating were the sending of emails, manners on the telephone, invitations and RSVPs, the hi and the 'bye, how to address a blended family, and how to avoid asking blunt questions.

One really does not need to know every detail. One only needs to know that etiquette requires that you greet people cordially, and put care into your communications.

### *Behavior in Public*

You yourself know when you are disgusted by the behavior of others in public places. This book honed in on issues of: manners on the bus, honking near people's homes, complaining to a merchant, how to lose gracefully at sport, and what to do when in Rome.

To summarize the etiquette rule here, it could be expressed either positively: 'Be courteous to strangers,' or negatively: 'In public, don't be an irritant to others.'

### *The Rules of Hospitality*

Hospitality comes naturally to almost everyone; you enjoy sharing your table and you want guests at your home to be comfortable. Chapters on this subject dealt with table manners, controlling your pet, and making introductions. There was also a checklist for parties given at home.

All of those things could be reduced to one rule: Be a thoughtful host.

### *Etiquette Exclusive to the Role of 'Kid'*

A few of the rules of etiquette are to be carried out particularly by minors and students. The chapter that discussed the Confucian ethic showed the importance of deference to one's

parents and sense of responsibility towards one's siblings. The chapter on etiquette at school laid out the rules by which students should show respect for teachers. (An adult, too, should defer to her past teachers.) Finally, the chapter on 'sleepovers writ large' emphasized that good behavior from a young houseguest is indispensable, including the thank-you note afterwards.

I would sum up the etiquette required of a child as: Use a respectful tone of voice to all adults. Young people who can manage that consistently are unlikely to go very far astray.

### *Personal Interactions*

Now for the main one: personal interactions. In this book I chose to lay out the rules for apologizing, thanking, borrowing and lending, talking to persons who are elderly and disabled, going on a first date, respecting the privacy of others, and maintaining confidentiality.

To summarize the area of personal interactions, the basic rule is: *Show consideration for the other person.* Put yourself in his or her shoes.

#### *'The' Rule*

The rule just mentioned is the main rule. Thus if you had never been told the particular rules governing personal hygiene, you could still figure out that it breaches etiquette to wear a smelly t-shirt, because the person sitting next to you will have to suffer it. It breaches etiquette to omit to send an RSVP, because the hostess won't be able to finalize her guest list. It breaches etiquette to toot 'goodnight' on the horn, when others in the neighborhood are trying to sleep.

You may challenge me by saying "But it is the done thing – my friends all toot 'goodnight'." That would imply that any current trend is the current etiquette. Not true. Etiquette does have a lot to do with customary, well-established practice. But if



that practice is offensive, and here you can be sure the woken-up neighbor is annoyed, then it could not be acceptable etiquette no matter how trendy.

Etiquette, however, is not identical to the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others what you would have them do unto you,' which is considered a moral rule or a religious commandment. Etiquette is a special sphere involving social roles, graciousness, and the formality of special occasions. Etiquette offers extra delicacy to those who like delicate manners, and extra security to those who worry about saying the wrong thing.

One must not overrate etiquette, it is not the be all and the end all. But it can certainly make one's day more pleasant (whether you're on the giving end of it, or the receiving end of it), and some who know the subject intimately have claimed that etiquette is a form of beauty.

I conclude this book by listing the six areas that were summarized above.

- Make a nice appearance.
- Act with decorum in public.
- Put care into your communications.
- Be a gracious host and cooperative guest
- Use a respectful tone of voice.
- Show consideration towards those who interact with you.

This is my comfort, when your words are done  
My woes end like with the evening sun.

*The Comedy of Errors*, Act 5, Scene 1



Dear Reader, how marvelous of you to have persevered!  
Now please sample an actual example of etiquette instructions  
for grown-ups. (It's for citizens who choose to participate in  
hearings at the state legislature of New Hampshire.)

After that, you might like a short excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet*,  
in case you have been hoping for a Bard byte longer than just a  
line or two.

You'll note the subtlety with which the two boys, Romeo and  
his cousin Benvolio, handle 'the girl problem.' Fun to imagine  
how it would be expressed today in text-messaging.



## Etiquette at the State House (from NHL liberty.org, retrieved February 21, 2013)

“When testifying at the New Hampshire State House and learning to be a liberty advocate, proper decorum is very important. After all, as an advocate you are trying to influence the Legislature and convince the members to see an issue your way. To do this, you must be taken seriously.

"Behaving as if you belong there is an easy and effective way to seem more influential. Learn where the various rooms are, sign in with assurance (bring a pen!) and act confident.

"Use the proper forms of address: Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman, Representative [*last name*], Honorable Committee. Under no circumstances use hostile, sarcastic, or profane language.

Be aware of your appearance, and how others perceive you. Jacket and tie, or equivalent, gives you a step up. Offensive T-shirts and camo are a definite step down. Good grooming should be taken for granted.

"Keep cool; if you show strong emotion at least some people in your audience will be embarrassed, and then they will forget most of what you had to say.

- *Enter and leave public hearings quietly.*
- It is OK to leave when you need to, as long as you are not disruptive.
- *No side conversations.*
- *No personal grooming* (nail cutting or filing, etc).
- *No outbursts* (positive or negative) in response to another person's testimony.
- Neither clapping, nor booing, nor any other response.
- *Turn off your cell phone* and other electronic devices.”

-- The above was written by New Hampshire Liberty Alliance



## An Excerpt from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

MONTAGUE

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroad?  
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began? ....

BENVOLIO

Here were the servants of your adversary,  
And yours, close fighting ere I did approach....

LADY MONTAGUE

O, where is Romeo? saw you him to-day?  
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

BENVOLIO

Madam, an hour before the worshipp'd sun  
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east,  
A troubled mind drave me to walk abroad;  
So early walking did I see your son...

MONTAGUE

Many a morning hath he there been seen,  
With tears augmenting the fresh morning dew.  
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;  
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun  
Should in the furthest east begin to draw  
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed....

BENVOLIO

My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

MONTAGUE

I neither know it nor can learn of him.

BENVOLIO

Have you importuned him by any means?

MONTAGUE

Both by myself and many other friends:  
Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow.  
We would as willingly give cure as know.

*Enter* ROMEO

BENVOLIO

See, where he comes: so please you, step aside;  
I'll know his grievance, or be much denied.

MONTAGUE

I would thou wert so happy by thy stay,  
To hear true shrift. Come, madam, let's away.

*Exeunt MONTAGUE and LADY MONTAGUE*

BENVOLIO

Good-morrow, cousin.

ROMEO

Is the day so young?

BENVOLIO

But new struck nine.

ROMEO

Ay me! sad hours seem long.

Was that my father that went hence so fast?

BENVOLIO

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

ROMEO

Not having that, which, having, makes them short.

BENVOLIO

In love?

ROMEO

Out--

BENVOLIO

Of love?

ROMEO

Out of her favour, where I am in love.

BENVOLIO

Alas, that love, so gentle in his view,  
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!

ROMEO

Alas, that love, whose view is muffled still,  
Should, without eyes, see pathways to his will! . . .



This love feel I, that feel no love in this.  
Dost thou not laugh?  
BENVOLIO  
No, coz, I rather weep.  
ROMEO  
Good heart, at what?  
BENVOLIO  
At thy good heart's oppression.  
ROMEO  
Why, such is love's transgression.  
Griefs of mine own lie heavy in my breast,  
Which thou wilt propagate, to have it prest  
With more of thine: this love that thou hast shown  
Doth add more grief to too much of mine own.  
Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs; ...  
What is it else? a madness most discreet,  
A choking gall and a preserving sweet.  
Farewell, my coz.  
BENVOLIO  
Soft! I will go along;  
And if you leave me so, you do me wrong.  
ROMEO  
Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here;  
This is not Romeo, he's some other where.  
BENVOLIO  
Tell me in sadness, who is that you love.  
ROMEO  
What, shall I groan and tell thee?  
BENVOLIO  
Groan! why, no.  
But sadly tell me who.  
ROMEO  
Bid a sick man in sadness make his will:

Ah, word ill urged to one that is so ill!  
In sadness, cousin, I do love a woman.

BENVOLIO

I aim'd so near, when I supposed you loved.

ROMEO

A right good mark-man! And she's fair I love.

BENVOLIO

A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit.

ROMEO

Well, in that hit you miss: she'll not be hit  
With Cupid's arrow; she hath Dian's wit;  
And, in strong proof of chastity well arm'd,  
From love's weak childish bow she lives unharm'd.  
She will not stay the siege of loving terms,  
Nor bide the encounter of assailing eyes,  
Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold:  
O, she is rich in beauty, only poor,  
That when she dies with beauty dies her store.

BENVOLIO

Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?

ROMEO

She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste,  
For beauty starved with her severity  
Cuts beauty off from all posterity....  
She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow  
Do I live dead that live to tell it now.

BENVOLIO

Be ruled by me, forget to think of her.

ROMEO

O, teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO

By giving liberty unto thine eyes;  
Examine other beauties.



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