

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

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A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

June 12th, 2018

FROM THE RECTOR

Down home truths about learning to read and write

My father – aka the Sage of Dedham Vale – maintained that the only way to be genuinely progressive was to be implacably opposed to progress. And the proof of this philosophical pudding is evident to all in the epidemic of functional illiteracy that afflicts our nation.

In 1900, some 90 percent of the American population were able to read and write. The U.S. government today is unduly coy about revealing the full extent of illiteracy in the U.S. but indications are that there has been a precipitate decline in literacy since the opening two decades of the last century.

Figures produced by the U.S. Department of Education indicate that 32 million adults – out of a population of 252 million over the age of 18 – can't read, while some 14 percent of adults have a "below basic" literacy level and a further 29 percent read at only a "basic" level.

This is a less than impressive performance considering the enormous increase in spending on education over the period. It might, thus, be worth asking what today's reading teachers – now styled "educators" – are doing wrong that the school masters and mistresses of yesteryear did right.

Things didn't change vastly in education in Britain – and probably the United States – between the opening years of the 20th century and the early 1950s. My village school was typical of most small rural school houses on both sides of the Atlantic.

The primary difference was that – owing to the rationing that continued into the 1950s – in rural England we wrote the alphabet and calculated simple math problems on old fashioned slates. We weren't allowed paper until we could read and write proficiently.

Schooling started between the ages of four and five. And for most of the village children it ended at 14. In the early 1950s, however, the leaving age was raised to 15. A national examination known as the 11-plus determined those few children who would go on to grammar or technical schools.

A tiny fraction sat for the Common Entrance Examination which gained the lucky few entrance to the so-called "Public Schools" – expensive and exclusive institutions that actually were, and still are, anything but public.

At the village school no effort was made to massage our egos. When we failed, we learned about our shortcomings swiftly. Our rare successes were recognized with a genuflection to the British stiff upper lip: a curt "Well done."

There was no kindergarten. First Grade – officially called "Babies" – was presided over by Mrs. White, a widow whose husband had been killed in the First World War, and

whose goal it was to teach every child in the village to read.

There was no dignity in being assigned to "Babies" and all of us wanted to get out of it as swiftly as possible. The only way out, however, was by learning to read, write and do simple sums.

It was all business from the word "go." Mrs. White made that clear in such crystal clear terms her words echo in my head more than half a century later.

"This the most important day of your lives," she said, "This is the day you start your education. How well you do in the next few years will affect the rest of your lives. If you work hard you'll get a good job and have a happy life. If you don't you'll end up like Sidney Jiggins' father, driving a dustcart."

We all knew Sidney's dad, a man who spent his spare time in pubs swilling beer and who was so lazy he didn't bother to replace broken windows, just plugged them up with cardboard. All of us, Sidney included, firmly resolved never be so feckless that we'd be reduced to working on dust carts (English English for garbage trucks). Sidney, like his seven

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Priscilla, Michael✘, Peter, Charlotte, Bryan, Dorothy, Rodney, June, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Robert✘, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Cour Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John, David, Adrian, Tom, Michell, Aida, Mai, Al, Kathy, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, Isobel, Judy, Elizabeth, Wade, Sifa, Theresa, Lisa, Larry, Patsy & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Caroline, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Cindy, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Erin, Aubery & Kathy

REPOSE OF THE SOUL: Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Bannister

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

brothers and sisters, loved his father, but were painfully aware of his shortcomings. (Actually none of them ended up hauling garbage. Thanks largely to Mrs. White, all of them became high-achieving professionals.)

Most of us made it out of Mrs. White's class within the year, some of us within six months. A few, however, took much longer to qualify for graduation. One person at least spent his entire school career in "Babies." His name was Tony, who, to use the clinical vernacular of the times, "educationally subnormal."

Tony's mental age at the time he graduated was between 9 or 10. He was an unusually tall boy with wavy brown hair, big brown eyes and a sweet, engaging nature.

Everybody in the village was fond of Tony. Indeed it was hard not to like him. He was popular at school though he

rarely spoke and seldom joined in games like tag and soccer. Usually he played on his own with his favorite toy – a big round tin lid.

Tony, you see, loved trucks, and every day he “drove” himself to school using the tin lid as a steering wheel. He was remarkably good at imitating the sound of a truck engine, changing down at corners and on hills.

When he reached Mrs. White’s classroom, he would “drive” up to his desk, reverse into his chair and turn off his engine. It was a tad disconcerting at first, but we soon got used to him driving everywhere, even up to the chalk board to answer a question.

When he left school at age 15, he was able to read and write thanks to Mrs. White’s patience and kindness. Curiously, perhaps, in view of his limitations, under her tutelage. He’d developed a remarkable aptitude for math – particularly mental arithmetic.

A job was arranged for him helping out at a local builders’ yard . Then, shortly after his 17th birthday, he passed his driving test with flying colors. This led to a promotion to truck driver delivering materials to building sites and hauling gravel from the company’s gravel quarry.

Over the years I lost touch with Tony and most of my village friends. That tends to happen when you work abroad. Indeed, keeping up with the family takes effort. In any event, a few years back, while visiting my father and mother, talk turned to affairs in the village and old acquaintances, including Tony.

“Tony’s really doing well,” said father, “He married shortly after you left and he’s got two sons. They’ve grown up now and help him run his business.”

Tony, it turned out, was the owner of a gravel quarry and a fleet of heavy trucks that shipped his gravel all over county and beyond.

“The building firm he worked for was taken over by another company that was not interested in the gravel business,” father went on, “The people Tony had worked for thought so highly of him they arranged for him to buy the quarry. He’s made quite a go of it.

“It’s quite a remarkable story. If it wasn’t for old Mrs. White, he would probably have ended up in a sheltered work shop. As it is, he’s a millionaire – on paper at least.”

One wonders how many folks like Tony are in sheltered workshops today because the Mrs. Whites of the education world have gone the way of the dinosaur. GPH✳

FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Vacation Bible School

St Stephen's Vacation Bible School will run on the afternoons of Monday, June 25th to Friday, June 29th from 1.00 PM to 4.00 PM. It is open to children from four to 11. The theme for this year's event will be "Jesus is our superhero." We are asking for a nominal \$20 contribution per child to help defray costs.

St Stephen’s Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093
Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 443-425-2420
Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Rev. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*
The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*
Associate Rectors: The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Wiley Hawks, The Rev. Robert Ludwig and The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers.
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist
9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)
11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)
6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –
evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer
Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist
Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club
Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle
Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, June 20th, 7.00 pm

The Ladies Who Lunch

*Wednesday, June 20th 12.00 pm
at The Pepper Mill, Towson*

*For reservations: Call Sara Douglas
at 410-560-9026*

The Vacation Bible School

June 25th to June 29th, 1.00 PM - 4.00 PM

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