

The Perpendicular Pronoun

An emotionally gripping visit to a traveling museum in San Francisco crystallized a gnawing lesson we all should heed. Somberly displayed deep ocean artifacts, the incomparable hubris of man and the havoc such hubris visits upon him shared one fitting moniker; Titanic!

A touring sea of relics retrieved from the seemingly unsinkable Titanic now fills the 4th floor of the Sony Metreon cinema complex in San Francisco. The disaster has always held a special fascination for me because of the timeless lesson of arrogance. We all know the story. Boasted as unsinkable, there were insufficient life boats and no meaningful crew and passenger training. Sixty eight percent; 1,523 souls perished. How curious and sad that a species unparalleled in its ability to learn is the same species with incomparable abilities to refuse to do just that.

Hubris denotes overconfident pride and arrogance coupled with a lack of knowledge or interest in others or other's ideas. Lack of humility and a bad outcome are its hallmark. Thus, hubris is apropos for what we frequently see in professional sports, all level of politics and every day interpersonal relationships.

Sometimes, as I listen to politicians of whatever stripe or the escapades of sports heroes and other "celebrities", I swear I hear mantra like chanting of an ancient religion. It is the sound of pathetic zealots worshiping at the shrine of the perpendicular pronoun, "I". "I", as in hurrah for me. "I", as in isolating oneself from healthy influences of other's viewpoints. "I", as in ignorance owing to not becoming informed of facts before forming opinions. "I", as in idolatry of earthly people, places and things. And sadly, "I", as in ignoring others emotionally, psychologically or intellectually.

Actions and words that hurt or denigrate others in the pursuit of self promotion are just as frequently born of arrogance as they are of fear. Fear of what we don't know, the unfamiliar or seemingly unbelievable and the big one, fear that someone else might just have a better idea or a better mousetrap. We seem to forget that the only animal that thrives on self absorption is the sea sponge.

Power, position, and privilege can fertilize this unsavory aspect of human nature. So can the technology we surround ourselves with when it substitutes for simple and frequent human interaction. Yes, there are various levels of redeeming value directly or indirectly attributable to the cornucopia of toys our technological advances have spawned, but addiction to them takes us out of the game and that is a disservice to all.

When I, Madame P or whoever finds me worshipping at the shrine of the perpendicular pronoun, here is what always works. I focus on activities which engage me with the outside world in a manner where my skills serve the needs of others. I keep it fun, productive and creative and try to see the world through others' eyes-not as an intellectual exercise, but as an experiential one. I try to run into life and stop making so much noise while running away and I try to leave the arrangements of the dance steps of other people's lives to God and choreographers.

Opportunities for even the briefest yet rewarding interpersonal connections abound. Always try to RSVP, say thank you and speak up about a job well done. Formally acknowledge and value input into your world that others around you give. They took a risk to reach out to you. Encourage and seek out the experience of things you did not know. Be happy when shown new and challenging ways to build that mousetrap

The mighty ship, The RMS Titanic, rose and fell on the greatness of human ingenuity and dreams as well as arrogance. So too, do our lives. The sooner we all excommunicate from the church of the perpendicular pronoun, "I", the better for all.