

PART IV:

RACISTS ANONYMOUS

MY NAME IS JERRY,
AND I'M A RACIST!

RACISM: The belief that some races are inherently superior (physically, intellectually, or culturally) to others, and therefore have a right to dominate them.

The Reverend Mr. Dulin is a spiritual leader in the Lawrence Community. More than once, while listing his concerns before the City Commission, Mr. Dulin said, "This is not an indictment." He wants us to reason together, and he knows that indictments stir up bad feelings of resistance and reprisal. I agree with Mr. Dulin. What I am writing is not an indictment, but a confession.

My name is Jerry, and I'm a Racist.

My name is Jerry because my parents gave me that name; I'm a Racist because my well meaning parents, having been taught by their parents to be Racists, left me a legacy of heretofore unmentionable Racist attitudes.

I'm a Racist because the first time I read the headline "INDIAN KILLED BY POLICE FIRE," I thought (secretly, silently, keeping my personal thoughts to myself alone, "Those Indians are always getting themselves into trouble. Why can't they behave like we do?" And I thought, "The headline writer should have been more polite. Political correctness calls for a euphemism. It should say 'Native American.' We don't call them Indians anymore."

I'm a Racist because the first time I read the humdrum boring routine introductory part of the Transcript of the Coroner's Inquest into the Death of Gregg Sevier the Jury selection phase the part where the Prosecuting Attorney asks the potential Jurors to raise their hands if they belong to associations or organizations relating to Native Americans, noting that none of them raised their hands, I silently said to myself, "I don't belong to any such organization or association either. Our D.A. is trying sincerely to select an impartial Jury. If I were on that Jury panel I would not raise my hand either."

I'm a Racist because I failed, at that first reading, to recognize the fact that those hands that were not raised are the same hands that we place over our hearts when we pledge our allegiance to one indivisible nation with liberty and justice for all.

In the traditional style of White America none of the Seviere's peers among the potential Coroner's Jurors stretched their imagination far enough to see how closely how inextricably our own native country is related to our Native American neighbors. All of them and all of us belong to an organization or association relating to Native Americans. And African Americans. And German Americans. And Armenian Americans. And Asian Americans. And Spanish Americans. All members of those groups have one outstanding common interest a binding commonality. The name of the organization that we all belong to is not the American Indian Movement or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It's name is America. The United States of America.

My name is American , and I'm a Racist.

I'm also an alcoholic.

Alcoholism and Racism have certain characteristics in common. Society as a whole suffers from the effects of both. Modern police officials readily admit that their work would be reduced by at least fifty percent if Americans stopped drinking alcohol. Reduction of Racism in Lawrence, Kansas is seen as a worth while goal and a solution to serious social problems. Individuals and communities afflicted with the deadly illnesses of Alcoholism and Racism are often totally ignorant of having the disease. Some admit secretly, but publicly deny, that they have it.

Twenty six years ago God (as I understand Him) got me started on a twelve-step Alcoholics Anonymous program aimed at giving me a life free from the devastation that was being caused by my drinking.

Twenty-six years ago, with the help of God, I learned to benefit from saying to myself and to a roomful of other recovering alcoholics, "My name is Jerry, and I'm an alcoholic." The cure began when I was able to admit with total honesty that I had the disease. By learning and practicing the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am able, thank God, to enjoy life without alcohol. I was blessed by learning that I did not have to drink anymore. I admitted that I was "powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable."

And now I'm saying, "My name is Jerry and I'm a Racist."

And now God (as I understand Him) is telling me that my Racism can be controlled if only I can take the same steps again.

The transfer is easy. About two hundred words are used in spelling out the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. By changing one percent of those words, the deed is done. By changing "alcohol," which appears only once in those Twelve Steps, to "Racism," and by changing "Alcoholics" to "Racists," the document becomes the Twelve Steps of Racists Anonymous.

THE TWELVE STEPS ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him , praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

RACISTS ANONYMOUS

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12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to Racists, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of people who recognize that alcoholism cannot be cured. We support one another and we follow a time tested twelve step program that enables us to achieve sobriety. The program is simple, and it is effective. Since its founding in 1935, the AA 12 step program has helped thousands of people to live their lives free of the burden of alcohol.

Racists Anonymous is a growing fellowship of people who recognize that Racism cannot be cured. We support one another and we follow a brand new twelve step program that will enable us to achieve harmony within ourselves, our homes, and our communities.

Alcoholism, like Racism, is a progressive illness that can never be cured. But its progress can be slowed, and its victims can and do find means that lead us toward recovery.

How is Racism progressive? Our Federal Government's Bureau of Census divides the citizens of this nation into groups based solely on an ill defined criterion called "Race." Our Chamber of Commerce publishes the data. It invites comparison. It shows us that when we compare our numbers with theirs, we're ahead of them. There is strength in numbers; we who belong to the larger group are stronger. We are the majority, and the majority rules.

Racism progresses when we think of how many of "them" there are in "our" city. Racism progresses when we allow the Mass Media to control our thinking.

Research studies in mass communication show that the major effect of the Mass Media is not to change public opinion, but to reinforce preconceived ideas. Racism progresses when we read in the papers that an armed drunk Indian lunged at police officers and we heave a sigh of frustration and wish those minority people would stop being so violent. Racism progresses when we deny that we belong to any organization or association relating to the "minority communities," believing the myth that we are separate and superior.

Can Racism be stopped by an effort of will? Probably not. Many recovering alcoholics have, on their way to the salvation offered by Alcoholics Anonymous, promised themselves, their families, their friends, and their employers, after some alcohol induced horror, that we will never take another drink. Sooner or later our will weakens and we feel terrible. We seek a better feeling by gulping a quantity of alcohol. The horror returns, and the promises are repeated, only to be broken again and again.

Can we stop Racism by making up our minds that we are, from now on, forever and ever, going to be especially polite to the Blacks, American Indians, Eskimos, Aleutians, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Hawaiians, Guamanians, Samoans, Persons of Spanish Origin, and Others who comprise a certain minor percentage of our population? Probably not.

Won't those people be satisfied, and won't the problem go away if we show them that we are capable of harmoniously tolerating their presence in our community? Probably not.

Alcoholics who try through an effort of will to stop being alcoholics usually feel an intolerably high degree of frustration. To deal with that bad feeling itself we feel an overpowering need to have another drink. For us who are alcoholics, one drink inevitably and irresistibly calls for another and another. And thus the cycle of horror continues.

Total abstinence is the only "cure," and many of us alcoholics have learned through trial and error blundering trial and disastrous error that if we are to practice total abstinence, with its vast inherent rewards, we need the help of a Higher Power. Every one of the more than five hundred recovering alcoholics in Lawrence, Kansas today knows that one more drink will bring the destructive force of the illness back into full bloom. And we know that our Higher Power can and will help us to avoid taking that next drink.

The Higher Power is God, "as we understand Him." Alcoholics Anonymous does not try to force anyone to understand the nature of God. Understanding the nature of God is left to the individual alcoholic.

On faith alone we turn our will and our lives over to His care, saying, and believing, "Now it's God's problem not mine."

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous are not recruited. We take no pledge and we sign no contract. Nobody records our attendance at AA meetings and there are no dues to pay. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. Anyone with that desire is welcomed into the fellowship. I heard a successfully recovering alcoholic say, in an AA meeting, "If someone walked into this meeting room and said, 'I'm a sex maniac, a thief, an embezzler, a criminal, a wife beater, a child abuser, a gossip, and a miserable failure. I even tried suicide and failed at that. I'm an alcoholic, and I want to stop drinking,' why we'd just say, 'Come on in, Brother. You're one of us.'" Concerned citizens of America say, "I'm a Racist and I want to control Racism in myself and in America." Racists Anonymous replies, "Come on in, Brother. You're one of us."

The thousands of Alcoholics Anonymous groups throughout the world usually hold weekly meetings. But attendance at meetings is not required for continuing membership. The only requirement for membership is a sincere desire to stop drinking.

The leaders and citizens of the Lawrence Community are looking for an effective, low-cost solution to the Racism problem. Racists Anonymous can provide such a solution. There are no time-consuming meetings in Racists Anonymous. It is designed to be attractive to single individuals who have a sincere desire to stop Racism. Money is used, but only as a reminder of the Source of sanity.

Alcoholics who do attend AA meetings are often invited to speak, but many only listen, applying what they hear to their own lives.

Nobody in AA says, "Do this ," but recovering alcoholics often say, " This is what I did."

Those of us who do speak before AA groups usually start by saying our name and stating the fact, "I am an alcoholic."

That statement is in itself a short form of the first of the Twelve Steps. We are powerless over alcohol. When the power of alcohol is unleashed it makes our lives unmanageable. Admitting our weakness leads us toward the influence of the Higher Power that can and will and does restore us to sanity.

Keeping in constant contact with our Higher Power helps us to stay sober.

Getting out of touch brings disaster.

There is good news for the inevitable prudent skeptics who will ask, "How much does it cost?" The good news is that it costs no money whatsoever. But money is a vital tool for accomplishing the goals of Racists Anonymous.

Money is power, but the power of our money has never yet been exploited as it is exploited by the Racists Anonymous organization. Our National Motto, " IN GOD WE TRUST ," is printed on every coin and every piece of paper money issued by the Treasury of the United States. It takes faith to believe that a Higher Power can restore us to sanity. It takes courage, humility, and even stronger faith to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Power outside ourselves. We need to be able to hold in our hands a constant reminder of the fact that the Power that can save us from Alcoholism and Racism is available to us.

The motto is on our money, and our money is in our hands. "In God We Trust" reminds us and will save us from our self destructive Racist attitudes and their consequences.

The telephone number of Alcoholics Anonymous is listed in every telephone directory in America. Help for alcoholics is as close as our nearest telephone.

Racists Anonymous is even easier to contact. It's as near as our nearest mirror.

In the beginning was the word Racism, but in the beginning I could not see how that word affected my own life.

Pondering the problem and seeking solutions, I cast about for examples and instances of Racism in Lawrence, Kansas. Then I realize that examples and instances abound, and that repeating them is not enough. All of them are outside of my control; I can protect my ego by pointing them out. I can point my accusing finger at others and tell of the awful things they do, and I can point with pride to my own behavior and shout, " I didn't do it !"

It's not enough to speak of the four White boys who harassed Bill Simons' daughter by following her down Massachusetts Street and chanting "Nigger bitch."

Nor to mention the newly arrived Lawrence homeowner who was told, "Some of the neighbors are niggers, but they're good niggers. They know their place."

Nor to mention the Haskell professor who watched a local merchant accepting a White man's check, only to have the same merchant say to him, moments later, "We don't take checks."

Nor to suggest that the treatment of the Sevier family would have been less severe if their ancestors had been Swedes and Czechs instead of Creeks and Choctaws. But I didn't do it ! Did you?

We didn't do it, but we stood by and (with our limited awareness of Racism) watched it happen.

Telling and retelling those anecdotes, reciting specifics, pointing the bitter finger of accusation only widens the gap, breeds hostility, inhibits understanding, and accomplishes no good. Something more is needed. The people of the Heart of America need to know, and have a right to know, the meaning and the being of Racism.

Those stories often sound like fault finding indictments, attacks, and accusations; they invite defense and denial. We find comfort in the belief that we understand the problem. The Mayor was speaking for the White Community when he said to Dan Wildcat, "I certainly do have great respect for you and where you're coming from."

"So I hope you know where I'm coming from," said Mr. Dulin to the Mayor, and the Mayor said, "Yes, sir."

Do we really know where we're coming from? Do we ever treat some individual human beings in different ways from others solely because of their race? Do we ever, in the secret corners of our hearts, believe that our race is superior to theirs and therefore has a right to dominate?

Some enlightenment came to me in Tahlequah, the oldest town in Oklahoma.

"I'm not familiar with Lawrence, Kansas," a Tahlequah lady said to me, "but if there has been a problem of violence among the Indian Community, wouldn't the Police be justified in thinking that to enter the home of Indians represented a greater threat to their own safety?" I was visiting with a professional woman who had known Gregg Sevier personally and remembered him as a quiet, peaceful boy. She had been out of touch with Gregg for years. She had heard of his death, but did not know the details. Having told her the brief facts of the case I listened to her question. "Good question," I said, nodding my gray head wisely.

Driving back to my musty Muskogee motel room I thought it over again. My initial internal response was "Maybe she's got something there!" I found myself seeking to justify the behavior of my White brothers in their confrontation with the Armed Aggressive Attacking Indians. A review of my own unconscious and spontaneous response showed me something about the being of my own Racism and the blindness that is a part of its nature.

I shall be forever grateful to that Tahlequah lady. She unwittingly helped me to put myself into the picture. She prompted me to look at my own past in terms of Racism. The revelation is startling.

"I AM a Racist!" I shouted at my image in the mirror. I had taken the FIRST STEP. In earlier times, a Power greater than myself had saved me from the insanity of alcoholism. Maybe that same Power would work on my Racism for me. A memory of a voice in the distant past spoke to me and told me that if I believe the Power will work, then it will work. What did I have to lose? I believed it! Thus I had taken the SECOND STEP.

I remembered seeing a photograph of Gregg's grave marker with its "In God's Hands" inscription. I deliberately and consciously (with Charity aforethought) made a decision to put the problem in God's hands and waited, relaxed, to see what would happen next. By making that decision I took the THIRD STEP.

My admission of my own racism inspired me to take a closer look at where I'm coming from, and to make a searching and fearless inventory of myself in terms of own racist attitudes. I was on my way to the FOURTH STEP.

Although there are other ways to make the inventory, I chose to do it in writing. Here I share it with my readers. In so doing I feel that I am progressing toward the FIFTH STEP.

I hope readers will keep in mind that I am not saying, "Do this," but rather, "This is what I did."

My maternal grandfather, descendant of a seventeenth century immigrant from England, was a Methodist minister and an alumnus of Baker University. He was born and raised at Crestline, Kansas. The remains of my grandfather and my grandmother, a descendant of German Mennonites and a native Illinoisan, now occupy adjacent graves in a corner of the cemetery at Pittsburg, Kansas. My mother was born in Columbus, county seat of Cherokee County. My own entire elementary and secondary education took place in the Galena Public Schools.

Although my roots are in Cherokee County, Kansas, and although my grandparents are buried in Pittsburg, Kansas, and their parents are buried in Columbus, Kansas, where my mother was born, I am not a native Kansan. My parents were living temporarily, in Canon City, Colorado when I was born. We moved to Galena when I was six. As I grew up in Kansas, I learned about my world. The extreme southeast corner of Kansas was the world of my youthful, formative years. Looking backward, seeking insight, I find that my heart and my head did not always agree in those formative years. Thinking and feeling differ. Emotion sometimes overrules intellect.

My world was as good as it gets, and I didn't know any better; I envied no one. As a child in Kansas, I was happy and proud to learn that I lived in The Free State, where decent, White, Christian people Do The Right Thing, always. Most of us, that is. Most of the time.

At least we try to Do The Right Thing, and for the Right Reasons. Unlike the Racists in the South and the Bigots who live elsewhere, we are generously tolerant of other Races. Unlike the people across the line in Missouri, we allowed the Colored people into our schools and we tolerated their presence in our restaurants.

As my development progressed I learned that certain facts of life are to be taken for granted. I learned that Republicans are a little better than Democrats, Methodists a little better than Baptists and Catholics. Episcopalians are a little better off than we are, economically, but they drink a lot more than we do. I was glad to know that my own group was The Best, and that all other groups are arranged in a descending hierarchy from My Group.

I was taught, in subtle ways, that the members of certain groups in our society are classified by anatomical pigmentation, language, and methods of seeking earthly pleasure and eternal salvation. Those of us who looked "White," spoke English the right way, and did The Right Things, I was told, were superior to those who did not. I learned that I should not say the word "nigger" except in whispered, private conversations with other White people. It was impolite to call Colored people niggers in their presence because it might hurt their feelings. "Niggers have feelings just like we do," I was told. As a child I secretly wondered if the black would rub off on my white skin if I touched them, and I was afraid to find out.

I was unaware of any Indians in Galena, Kansas, when I was growing up there between 1936 and 1948. I vaguely knew that a lot of them lived in Oklahoma, and that something called the Cherokee Nation existed nearby, to the south.

I learned, as everybody does, that the Indians were good at dancing and that they valued primitive superstitions, bright colors, flashy handicrafts, beaded belts, feathers, turquoise trinkets, and firewater. I could see that my fellow White people valued Indian works of art, especially in the form of fossils--remnants of a dead era when the Indians roamed our country shooting at each other with stone-tipped arrows, burying their dead with expensive pottery and other things that now decorate the shelves of our museums, only to be dug up and admired and displayed by those of us who almost always did The Right Thing.

Those works of primitive art were produced before the Indians became our enemy, the wild ferocious savages who, as I learned from popular movies, burned our wagon trains and raided our defenseless settlements, ravaging our women and stealing our things, insanely holding on to the land that it was our God-given right, the fulfillment of our Manifest Destiny, to possess and develop for the good of Mankind.

Some large part of my training came from my relatives and neighbors. And some came from our pervasive and effective educational creation, the Mass Media. The Mass Media educate us about our own myths and legends. Take Santa Claus, for instance. I doubt that my great great grandparents were ever privileged really to know Santa Claus. His detailed physical description did not become a part of our folklore until 1823.

Whenever I hear the name of Santa Claus, however, my enlightened mind shows me a vivid picture of that jolly old elf. Clement Clark Moore's poem, "A Visit From Saint Nicholas," first published in 1823, gave the world a word picture of who Santa Claus is, how he is dressed, and how he performs his good works. The cartoonist Thomas Nast, 1840-1902, an immigrant from Germany, went further. With his newspaper cartoons he showed the world what Santa Claus really looks like.

The Mass Media, including books, movies, and magazines taught me, a White child growing up in Kansas, that Indians were either extremely crafty and sly and vicious or extremely noble. I was taught that a few of them, very few, were brilliantly outstanding in some limited way, like Sequoyia, Will Rogers, Jim Thorpe, Benito Juarez; that most of them were dirty, indolent, and apathetic when sober; violent and dangerous when drunk.

"Route Sixty-Six," a major transcontinental transportation artery of the Thirties and Forties, entered Galena from Missouri, passed through the town, and plunged south, into Oklahoma. Indian Territory. Home of the Red Man. My friend, attending a service station on Galena's eastern City Limit, the Missouri-Kansas State Line, told of a New Yorker who stopped to fuel his Cadillac and said, trembling with fearful excitement, "My map shows Highway 66 going into Oklahoma. Are there Indians there? Should I be armed?"

"No, you'll be okay," my friend told him. Sharing the common knowledge of the day and of the region and its peoples with this white stranger from back east, he said, "They're peaceful when they're sober. They make friends for life. Their kids are real cute. But if you're their enemy, look out. And be sure to keep your distance when they're drunk. They are experts at throwing knives. If you're lucky, you'll see some of them dancing at a powwow. That's real interesting."

In 1941 my sixth-grade teacher told me something about Haskell Institute in Lawrence.

"Visit it if you get a chance," she said. "It's very interesting. It's a school where the Indians can send their young people to learn how to be civilized." She told me how the United States government provides the Indians with Reservations so they can live together--among their own kind--and be happy. "It's hard to civilize wild people," my teacher said, but some progress is being made by the schools and the churches. Missionaries convert them to Christianity and teach them to give up their savage ways and their primitive superstitions. Thus I learned how nice we are to the Indians.

I knew, somehow, that Indians were clannish, and that they really were happier living in ignorance, filth, and squalor, and that only a few of them knew how to live properly, like decent White folks. "They ain't human," someone said, "Human beings couldn't live like they do."

Movies taught me that Indians talk in grunts or sign language, and I concluded that anyone who talks that way must be stupid, an object of pity or scorn. Ancient Indians were romantic; modern Indians were disgusting. And, sometimes, dangerous. It's best to keep your distance. Although I knew of no Indians or Asians in my home town, we did tolerate a token sampling of other ethnic groups. Outside of perhaps a dozen Negro families, one Jewish family, and a half dozen Dago families, all of us were White, Christian, English-speaking Americans.

There was also an amorphous group we called Poor White Trash. They did not share in the stewardship of the wealth that our Churches said was ours. They were Democrats, all of them, and most of them were on welfare. They had portraits of Franklin D. Roosevelt hanging on their living room walls. Their Churches taught them to bear those ills they had and to look forward to their reward in Heaven.

Those people we called Dagoes were not Italians (no Wops were there that I knew of), but the families of diligent, decent immigrants from Syria or Lebanon who had come to my country in the twenties. "Syrians" was the corollary of "Negroes," a politically correct euphemism. Some of my best friends were Syrians. In their homes they spoke Arabic, and most of them were not Muslims but Catholics. Their children were a lot like us, but the Them/Us distinction was clearly there. I remember hearing a beer-drinking, pool-shooting member of the Poor White Trash class deploring the fact that a local White girl had married a Dago. By the second generation many of them are "assimilating" well. As Danny Thomas (one of "them") assimilated.

As long as "assimilation" is important, people with darker skin and Mongolian features have a tougher time of it. They are indelibly marked as "different" from "us." Bill Simons is "White," and the mother of his children is "Black." Therefore, his children are not members of the White Community in Lawrence, but members of something that has now been named the African American Community.

Rastus (not his real name) was the only Black person in my class at East Galena School. There must have been some "White" ancestors in his family tree, but there were also Black ones. Therefore, Rastus was unquestionably "Black." Academically he was my classmate but socially he was not in my Class. He was clean, quiet, decent, and likable. Except for his skin color he was just like the rest of us. There was nothing low class about Rastus and his relatives except their skin color, and that was enough.

Although we were together from first grade through high school, we never really got to know each other. Like all the Colored boys in our public schools, Rastus was a good athlete and (because of his natural sense of rhythm) a good dancer. He lived up to the stereotype reputation we gave him. Of course we giggled and pointed at Rastus when our music teacher taught us to sing "Polly-Wolly Doodle," just as it was printed in our songbooks:

"I come to a river and I couldn't get across,
Come a Polly-Wolly Doodle all the day
So I jumped on a nigger 'cause I
thought he was a hoss,
Come a Polly-Wolly Doodle all the day,"
and so on.

But Rastus always took it well. In his good-natured way he sang along with us, and there was certainly no evil intent on our part. Rastus was fun to play with when we were little boys but I never really knew him as a person. I allowed his blackness to blot that person from my perception.

Forty years after our graduation, forty years after moving away from Galena, I was reminiscing with Rastus about the good old days, back in the Forties. I recalled the good times we enjoyed at our teenage skating parties. But Rastus had no memory of the good times I spoke of.

His memory of the good old days is different from mine. Rastus was barred from joining us in the skating rink because of his skin color. But the kind owner of the skating rink reserved one night a week for Colored People, and they came from miles around. "It was more fun than a barrel of monkeys to watch them," a White classmate of ours recalls now, in 1991.

When Rastus and his black friends went to the movies they sat in the balcony because they knew their place. My White friends and I knew our place, too. We knew that we could sit wherever we chose; we were Free and White. Rastus and I lived in same classrooms for twelve years but we lived in different worlds. We coexisted in different realms of being. I tactlessly asked him at our fortieth reunion if being black had made any difference in his life. "I never really thought about it much," he said.

But I did. To my way of thinking, his blackness was his most salient feature. The color of his skin was so inherently linked to him that I thought about it every time I thought of Rastus.

Nor did I ever really think about Racism much, until recently. I lived in the Land of the Free. My Statue of Liberty invited the oppressed peoples of the world to join me here in a beautiful country where there is Liberty and Justice for all. Traditional, unwritten codes of conduct dominated the lives of my black neighbors, limiting their liberty and proscribing much of the justice that our written laws guarantee to all people. Those unwritten codes were invented and sustained by the White Majority. Anyone growing up in Kansas in the Forties accepted those conditions. Violations of the unwritten, unspoken codes would have undermined our American Way of Life. The only "ism" that we consciously practiced was Patriotism.

On sultry summer evenings many of us White people in Galena, Kansas, safe inside our parked cars, formed an appreciative audience for the religious services at a place we commonly called The Nigger Church. We made fun of the evangelistic preaching but we admired the singing. Those people had a natural ability for singing. In their good natured way they passed the collection plates among the parked cars. Thus the races interacted in Galena, Kansas in the Forties.

I was appalled when Rastus told me in 1988 he had "had a crush," back in the Forties, on one of our blonde, blue-eyed, full-blooded English, Episcopal, female classmates. "I didn't see nothing wrong with her at all," Rastus dared to declare to me. And even as I felt the shock of disbelief on hearing his pleasant, openly delivered "confession," I failed to see myself as a Racist.

In the Thirties and Forties, most of us Whites accepted and practiced blatant racial discrimination because that's the way things were. Black people were tolerated in our town as long as they stayed in their place. If they displayed submissive respect toward all White Folks, and left our women alone, they were treated pretty much like anybody else.

Rastus must have known, in 1944, that to reveal the object of his first love would surely have brought an early and violent end to his young, innocent, naive life. Wisely, he kept that secret to himself for forty years.

Forgive us, Rastus, for we knew not what we did. We were trapped into a system that we could not understand. In our ignorance we were innocent. We White Folks could see no problem.

"The biggest problem in Lawrence, Kansas," Dan Wildcat told me one Friday afternoon in his office at Haskell in December, 1991, "is that so many people believe that there is no problem. I can't believe that the people have evil intent. They just don't know that they have Racist attitudes."

Without evil intent we children in Galena, Kansas learned other gems of American folklore: "Ching-chong Chinaman sitting on a fence, trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents." If there had been any "Asian-Americans" in our community in those fun filled days we would have been delighted to share that chant with them.

We were taught that the Japs were the enemy. In our "comic" books they were monsters with big teeth, yellow skin, and they all wore wire rimmed spectacles over their slant eyes. Knowing that our Federal Government had rounded up American citizens of Japanese descent and kept them in camps showed us that the distinction between us and them was not political or ideological, but racial. The word "yellow" was often used in reference to them. There was no evil intent; it was a matter of National Security.

Nor did our elementary school music teacher have evil intent in teaching us to sing about "Ten Little Indian Boys," with its comment on their sure but gradual disappearance-- "Ten little, nine little, eight little Indians no little Indian boys."

That part of Americana didn't seem to matter much to me as I was growing up in Kansas. I never met more than a very few Indians anyhow. One, a Navaho I met on a construction job in Colorado, was good-naturedly called either "Chief" or "Injun Joe." I never even knew his name.

I still get angry when I think of the selective process that chose the elements of American History we were taught and how that process left us deprived of Truth.

Until six months ago I scarcely knew, even in terms of their social history, a Seminole from a Yakima, or a Chippewa from a Navaho. I had never heard of the Five Civilized Tribes. I knew nothing of the history of horror and outrage that is the cultural heritage of the Creeks and Choctaws and Cherokees and Chickasaws and Seminoles.

I knew, vaguely, that treaties and promises had been made and broken, but I had no idea of the depth of deception, fraud, outright crimes, and cruelty that those gentle people--the ancestors of many members of the Lawrence Community--have endured at the hands of White immigrants to their land.

A short time ago I would have argued that "Yuchi" is definitely not an American Indian tribal name. The "Trail of Tears" was, to me, nothing but a poignant phrase; I had no clue as to its meaning or its date. Or its significance.

It took a shameful and horrible incident to jerk me out of the fog of ignorance and into the bright, unforgiving light of honest introspection. That incident was the shooting of Gregg Sevier. My sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh steps are personal and private. This book is a spin-off from my TWELFTH STEP.

The future of the Heart of America is, like the spirit of Gregg Sevier, in God's hands.

Some of the militant Spaniards who followed Columbus, acting in the name of God and the Spanish Royal Family, greeted the Indians by reading, in loud, clear Castillian Spanish, proclamations that commanded the Indians to lay down their arms, give up their primitive superstitions, join the Catholic Church, and accept the European invasion of their country, the dominance of the White Race, with a spirit of peace and harmonious cooperation. Not understanding their visitors' strange behavior, the Natives of America seemed deliberately to ignore those reasonable commands and got themselves slaughtered.

Somehow I see a correlation. The Conquistadores were Christians who acted with the full backing of their Government and lived under their God's Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill," to which their Law added, "except in certain specified justifiable circumstances."

Ever since its doors opened in Lawrence, Kansas 107 years ago there has been more cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity at Haskell Indian Junior College than at any other such institution in the country. The school's yearbook lists the tribal affiliation of every student. "We hold on to our tribal names with pride," one student told me. "It's one of the few things of any value that we have left." Nowadays one sees, in single individuals, many tribal combinations, such as "Sauk and Fox/ Assiniboin/ Sioux," but in earlier times the tribal origins were more "pure." A small cemetery on the Haskell campus has about one hundred graves, (the latest date of death, 1911; the earliest, 1885) among which 36 different tribes are represented. They are:

Arapahoe
Assiniboin
Caddo
Cheyenne
Chippewa
Comanche
Cherokee
Delaware
Hopi
Kaw
Kickapoo
Miami
Mission
Modoc
Mojave
Navaho
Cheyenne
Oneida
Osage
Ottowa
Papago
Pawnee
Peoria
Piute
Ponca
Potawatami
Quapaw
Seminole
Shawnee
Sioux
Ukie(Yuchi)
Ute
Winnebago
Wichita
Wyandotte

All of these diverse tribes, and more, are represented among Haskell's current population, yet all of them are classified by the U.S. Census as "American Indian."

It was in that quiet little cemetery at Haskell that Benny Smith led a memorial ceremony last Spring. Participants included the fathers of John Sandoval, Christopher Bread, Cecil Dawes Jr., and Gregg Sevier. Willie described the ceremony one evening as he and I stood there in the twilight among the moss covered headstones that mark the graves.

Do the people of Lawrence, Kansas recognize Haskell as the rich cultural treasury that it is? How many different languages, valuable beliefs, and worthwhile religions were held by the hearts of the human beings whose remains occupy Haskell's little cemetery? Although those individuals have all been dead for many decades, some of their descendants still possess their inherited cultures and are eager to share them.

Is it conceivable that some concepts from those cultures could lead us to realizing dreams of real equality? Concepts that could bring about the mending of the Heart of America? Something like this?:

PROMISE YOURSELF . . . To be so strong that nothing can disturb your Peace of Mind To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person you meet To make all your friends feel that there is something in them To look on the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own To forget about the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile. To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

-- Submitted [to "The Haskell Messenger"] by Benny Smith, assistant dean of students; taken from the American Indian Philosophy of the Good Mind.

Only to the victim is given the opportunity to forgive, and all of us are victims. The death of one person diminishes me. If it can happen to one minority it can happen to another, and the ultimate minority is the individual. Some of us were taught to be, are, and have long been, innocent liars. Seeking and finding Truth can put an end to the lying; getting acquainted with our neighbors might help.

In elementary school, where they taught us the "elements", we learned, in unison, to mouth the words: "liberty and justice for all." and we sang of our "sweet land of liberty." Did we think of the lack of liberty and justice in our neighbors' lives? Do we now carefully arm ourselves against a threat of potential violence when entering a home where Indians are living? Do we say, "Yassah" in response to a Black man's plea for equal treatment?

Hypocrisy is, thank God, an endangered species. The time has come for the total elimination of hypocrisy. Forgiveness is in. Hypocrisy is out. What a relief it is to say, "I don't have to feel guilty any more. I don't have to be hated any more. As my own self esteem gains strength, so does the self esteem of all my siblings in the human family. If I am to have Truth, Beauty, and Goodness in my life--in my world--then it's up to me to put it there. And I am capable of putting it there."

In a land where liberty and justice truly exist for all, there is no need for a Civil Rights Movement or an American Indian Movement. In a sober and healthy nation there is no need for a Temperance Movement.

All of us can live the lives that were promised to us, in the land of the free and the home of the brave. The home of the courageous Americans who fearlessly and wholeheartedly welcome all Americans into the united American family. The home of those who are free to be, and to enjoy the being of their neighbors.

THE UNARMED INDIAN

"Is somebody working on that painting?" I asked Willie Sevier one evening when he had graciously let me go to work with him. The mural I was pointing at is in the building where Willie and the other custodians and security men at Haskell Indian Junior College have their offices. A life-size, brown skinned youth stands very erect. He has colorful paint on his face and feathers in his long black hair. Beside him stands an upright lance. But the mural is unfinished. In the blank space that runs diagonally across his center mass the artist has sketched the outline of a rifle. This young Indian Male is not armed with a rifle, though. Not yet. Only a lance.

"No," Willie said, "No one has worked on that painting for years. Ever since they moved the Art Department out of this building and we moved in.

So that explains the unarmed warrior. Some day I'll ask Willie if he sees any significant symbolism there. At that moment, intent on introducing me to Haskell's physical plant, he said, "Right. It didn't get finished on account of the removal of the Art Department."

On the coffee table in Willie and Orene's living room I had seen a miniature two foot tall replica of James Earle Fraser's sculpture "The End Of The Trail." Mr. Fraser was the designer of the Buffalo Indian Head nickel. I learned that the original End Of The Trail, eighteen feet tall, two and a half times life-size, is in the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. The statue attracted my attention; a photograph of that statue decorated the dining room wall in my own parents' home all during my childhood, and I had seen another photograph of it in the vestibule of the Lawrence Indian United Methodist Church. The sculptor captured and expressed great emotion by the downward bending of the man's head and his horse's exhausted appearance. "That statue is one of my favorites," Judy told me. "It says what I feel."

The U.S. Bureau of Census provided some of the data for a pamphlet that I bought from the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce entitled "Demographic Information of Lawrence, Kansas." From that pamphlet I learned that the 1980 population of the city, broken down by Race, included 2 Aleutians, 5 Samoans, 5 Guamanians, 7 Eskimos, 10 Hawaiians, 43 Filipinos, 52 Vietnamese, 196 Japanese, 269 Asian Indians, 298 Chinese, 1,330 "Others," 1,579 American Indians, 2,919 Blacks, and 45,895 Whites, for a total of 52,738.

The same source told me that a small percentage of the total is labeled as "Persons of Spanish Origin." For the convenience of the reader (and the writer), this group is broken down by Country of Origin and by Race. Seven hundred fifty three of them are Mexicans, sixty-eight of them are Puerto Ricans, twenty-eight of them are Cubans, and five hundred ninety-two of them are "Others." By Race, sixteen are Black, six hundred thirty-six are White, and seven hundred thirty-six are Other, for a total of one thousand four hundred thirty-three Persons of Spanish Origin.

If Christopher Columbus were alive today and living in Lawrence, Kansas, one wonders which category he would find himself in. "Spanish Origin" doesn't seem to fit, for he was of Italian origin. Was Columbus White? Probably not White enough. Other?

Racism is a reflection on America. To contact Racist Anonymous look into the face you see in the nearest store window or mirror.

In remembrance of Gregg Sevier, take the right steps to eradicate Racism, but only if the moccasin fits you.