

In this time of increasi



ng incivility, at least in politics, I have a confession to make. Across a lifetime in nine states—from New York to California—I can barely give myself a B- in etiquette.

Never had a class in it, never had the finer points drilled into my head, never even gave it much thought until grad school. Our courses in social psychology often focused on the many forces swirling around all of us that affect individual and group behavior, positive or negative. Thank heavens for *Lowcountry Weekly*, particularly L.A. Plume's excellent column, "Calling Card." As a regular reader, I better understand how to cut cheese, dispatch oysters, set a table, thank someone, be nice. Among many other pointers.

But I still can't grade myself above a B-. Yet. I blame television for much of my shortcoming. Those mindless ads for Yoplait, with the simpering, singsong background music and repeating loops of "mmm... mmm" get me yelling at the TV. Then it's back to some political story or ad, and all sorts of uncharitable remarks leap from my lips. The unhinged, obnoxious fellow with the orange hair and red face who claims to be a unifier though he is widely and justly vilified as an egotistical hate monger especially gets my goat. I may intone, 'How can that blankety-blanking blank-head say that? It's not blanking true. He is an unmitigated \$%^&*\$%^&@#!!!' Carli Fiorina is "horrified" by Mr. Trump. Me too.

Climate change is also getting me increasingly riled up. *The Week* reported recently that oceans are rising more rapidly than ever: "We can say with 95 percent probability that the 20th century rise was faster than any of the previous 27 centuries" according to Rutgers University's study leader Bob Kopp. And if you can't trust an honest Kopp, who can you?

In near desperation for an additional lifeline back to civility, I reached out recently for

some guidance for the ages, classic wisdom from the mouth of one of the true etiquette greats. You guessed it, Amy Vanderbilt. No wonder she was such a beacon; look where she came from—Staten Island, the epicenter of modern decorum (isn't it?). Born in 1908, she died at my current age, so in my mind she is forever timely and relevant. And young! Fortunately, in my moments of recent frustration, I found her 1954 "Amy Vanderbilt's Everyday Etiquette," right in our home library! Just what I need, everyday guidance... nothing *too* fancy or highfalutin'. Just regular 'falutin.' Like me.

If I may quote some sample advice from Miss Amy based on her readers' ever-so-trenchant questions from hither and yon.

Q: How do you get stray bits of food on a plate onto your fork? O.L., Atlanta.

A: A combination of European and American style eating is very usual among sophisticated people and makes it easy for a diner to retrieve skiddy bits of food—like peas--- on his plate buy using his knife in his left hand as a pusher. But the completely American system is to use a bit of bread as a pusher. One never uses the fingers for this purpose.

JS: Wait, Amy, do I need to be "sophisticated" beforehand or does using a really good piece of bread make up for it? Did you really say "skiddy"?

Q: My husband insists on pouring gravy all over everything on his plate. I feel this is bad table manners. What do you think? Mrs. D.T.A., Butte.

□□□□□□□□□□ *A: Gravy—unless it is a gravy in which meat, fish, or other protein is incorporated (rarebits, curries, blanquettes, chilies, etc.)—is never poured or ladled on rice, noodles, or other than meat on the plate. It is an insult to the cuisine to inundate everything with gravy—or that American favorite, catsup. If you want to eat your potatoes with gravy, dip a forkful into the gravy that has escaped from the meat.*

JS: Hold it right there, kiddo... you mean it's not kosher to make a little gravy pond in my mashed potatoes?

□□□□□□□□□□ *Q: How do a man’s bow and a woman’s bow differ? Is it ever proper to refuse to return a bow if you’re a woman? Mrs. L.G., Port Chester.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *A: A man’s bow is a modification of the deep bow he learned as a boy in dancing class. When presented to a lady, he bows first slightly from the waist, eyes on her face, then steps forward awaiting her tendered hand. If she makes no offer to shake his hand, he keeps his own hand at his side.*

□□□□□□□□□□ *A lady’s bow is a slight modification of the head, usually accompanied by a smile. She follows her bow to a man with a handclasp if she wishes.*

JS: Ooh, I missed dancing class, is this stuff demonstrated on YouTube? Does my arthritic back grant me some latitude on how deeply I need to bow?

Q: Should a man remove his hat to kiss a lady? B.R.J., Bryn Mawr.

□□□□□□□□□□ *A: A man kissing a lady on the street—in greeting or farewell (only)—should always remove his hat, no matter what the weather. He should be careful concerning this courtesy even—or perhaps I should say especially—with his wife or daughter.*

JS: OK, but what if it’s rainy and windy and it’s a baseball cap and she’s wearing one too? Oh, alright, off it comes. Anything for better decorum.

Q: What do you consider the important “don’ts” for a man or boy to remember? E.N.B., Atlanta.

A: *Do not—*

‘Bilt to Last

Written by Jack Sparacino
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Enter a room before a lady unless it is dark and you wish to make it ready for her

□□□□□□□□□□ *Seat yourself while ladies are standing*

□□□□□□□□□□ *Speak or bow to a lady unless she has given some sign of recognition*

Smoke without asking permission of the lady you are accompanying or sit so near (as in a train) that the smoke might annoy her

□□□□□□□□□□ *Call any but your contemporaries, servants, or children by their first names*

Criticize another's religion, belittle his race or country, or refer unnecessarily to his color in his presence

□□□□□□□□□□ *Speak of repulsive matters at table.*

JS: I take it, then, we are not to speak of Mr. Trump at table. Or head lice. (Just checking!)

Q: How should a man refer to his wife to associates, to strangers? K.B., Richmond.

□□□□□□□□□□ *A: A man refers to his wife as “my wife” to acquaintances, “Betty,” to close friends, and “Mrs. Green” to strangers. He never uses the phrase “the wife.”*

JS: I'll be sure to share this with Betty, er, Jane. And hey, can I smoke a cigar on the train if the lights are on? How does that work again?

Gee, I feel better already just going back over these reminders. And they'll be especially handy in my role as "Man About Town" where I go about my business in public having actual conversations with people. If we're at adjacent restaurant tables, I even pledge not to chide them (much) on using too much ketchup or gravy.

Now, as for this business of my not cursing anymore at the TV. Tell you what, politicians and Yoplait advertisers, let's do a test. I'll doff my cap and bow my best bow if you will.