

# A Dying Culture?

By **JAMIE SWENSON**

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As a writer, I'm a witness. I'm an observer. I listen. I use my experiences to create vivid narratives. What I've witnessed lately is not so good. Rude people. I mean seriously rude people. It's like the Janesville is packed with them lately. I've heard people saying that it's a result of our bad economy - people are stressed out. I get that. But do they have to be so rude? Really?

As I drove over to Mocha Moment this morning I witnessed an extremely rude interaction at an intersection - the four way stop variety. It's 7:40 a.m. - people are moving somewhat mindlessly through intersections. At the first stop, three of the four cars arrived instantaneously. To my knowledge, in this instance the car to your right as the right of way ... but one car must not have realized the correct order and started across the intersection at the same moment as another car. Both cars stopped. The Right of Way car immediately started flinging his arms about. And I'm not a lip reader, but I don't think he was saying, "Pardon me, I believe you are incorrect in your assumption that you're next. I do believe it's my turn." No, I think his words were the four letter variety. He was clearly annoyed and angry with the person who had started through the intersection incorrectly. At the same moment, the Wrong Way person had stopped and motioned the Right person to continue ... but the Right Way person continued to sit there waving his arms like a crazy person.

I thought - really?

It's 7:40 a.m. Monday morning and that person is already lacking all patience, kindness and apparently manners. It was no biggie ... the Right person could have just waved, smiled and continued - allowing the wrong person to apologize (by using the whoops-I-wasn't-sure-whose-turn-it-was wave) and all would have continued. Instead, we all witnessed an adult meltdown before 8 a.m. I told my kids to pay attention to those reactions from people. If that person reacted that way so early in the morning in his car, when really, nothing that terrible had

happened, how does he deal with real problems all day?  
I've seen this behavior in drivers (as we all have) for years. People have no patience. They cut-off other people, they flip the bird, they speed by way too fast ... they are more important than everyone else I suppose.

And those people who are speeding around being rude end up as that rude cashier, the complaining customer, the obnoxious people at the table next to you in the restaurant, the cell phone talker at the movies, and the fuming person in line behind you. Are we really that rude? From what I've been witnessing - yes. So, I settle in at Mocha Moment and look up at the chalkboard thought they always have posted - and the Robert Heinlein quote seemed apropos to my morning:

"A dying culture invariably exhibits personal rudeness. Bad manners. Lack of consideration for others in minor matters. A loss of politeness, of gentle manners, is more significant than is a riot..."

Of course, Mr. Heinlein probably wrote that sometime in 1955 - I wonder what he would write today?

My goal this week? To be patient with strangers - and even more patient with my family (it is Thanksgiving week after all! - Lots of family time! Grin.)

Have a good week. Hope you're reading something good. I saw Harry Potter Part I on Saturday -- and give it FIVE out of FIVE stars ... I will go see it again.

Oh, and don't push anyone down while rushing for the \$1 televisions and Snuggies on Friday morning! Grin.