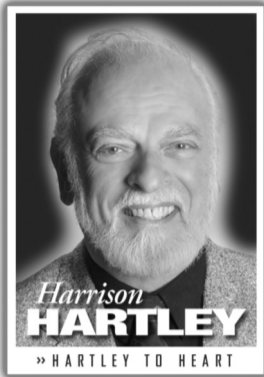


## Dr. King, Race, and Humpty Dumpty

This week began with a national celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream and for me a renewed awareness of an irritating burr under my mental saddle blanket. The irritation has to do with words. People who should know better use some of our most important words loosely, sloppily, and seem to be bent on reducing their specificity, clarity, and utility rather than protecting and sharpening their application and meaning. "Race" is one of those words, and one of the most important of them.

Humpty-Dumpty would love it.

Somewhere in Wonderland the arrogant egg tips his hand: "A word" (said Humpty-Dumpty) "means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less." This is a perfect statement of the core principle of post-modern literary theory, one of the more stupid fads ever to plague academic and popular culture. It is an intellectually unforgivable bag of tricks for reducing communication to mush and its primary appeal is to those who lack the discipline to make sense. The particular burr that irritates me most about this pretentious tomfoolery, however, is that scientists and philosophers, who ought to know better, seem to have bought into it in part; or at least are guilty of sloppy application themselves.



Race is not the only word threatened by a near extinction of meaning. "Theory" is another very important one, "instinct" is another, and so are "time" and the idea that one might "go back in time" by out-distancing yesterday's light waves. There are more, but none of them

has quite the immediate impact of "race" on our daily lives (although "theory" comes close). "Race" as it has come to be used in ordinary language (and as it is increasingly accepted, unfortunately, in science and philosophy), means little more than "tribe" or "club," and about the only specificity popular culture seems to want to

allow it is in reference to skin color, hair texture, or other trivial anatomical details.

Not so long ago (in the middle of the last century) "race" was taken to refer solely to four primary human ethnic groups and their subdivisions, based mainly on skin color: the Caucasoid (or "white" races), the Negroid (or "black" races), the Mongoloid (or "yellow" races) and American Indians (or "red" races). Even as a young fellow and a tyro in anthropology and ethnology, it was evident to me that "white" people aren't white, nor "black" ones black, nor "yellow" ones yellow, and I knew many First Americans who were decidedly not "red." Furthermore it was a great puzzle

that any two representatives of any of these various "races" could, with the right anatomical combination, produce viable offspring who could in turn, produce viable offspring with any other member of any other "race" of the opposite sex.

So, I wondered even as a teenager (is that a race?) what "race" would a person be whose ancestors, going in alternate generations as far back as it is possible to go, had a completely "mixed-race" lineage with each "race" so intermixed and diluted that none was dominant? Even in one generation, if a person had a "black" grandfather, a "red" grandfather, a "white" grandmother, and a "yellow" grandmother, what "race" would that person be? It seemed evident to me at the time and I have yet to hear a cogent argument that addresses any reasonable alternative, such a person would be human because there is only one human race and all humans are part of it.

I used to be able to treat this idea in school by asking class members: "How many human races are there?" The responses invariably got to the old four standard ethnic types, to which I would suggest, sagely, "But aren't they all Homo sapiens?" This was a good spur to discussion, and the implication, of course, is that "race" ought to be synonymous with "species." I still think it should be, otherwise, what does it mean?

The way "race" is used today practically everything fits and the good scientific and logical job of

classification and division is diluted to such a degree that, like Humpty, it means anything anybody wants it to mean. Is there a Chinese race? I've heard it said that there is, so why isn't there an Italian race? What about members of the Moose Lodge – are they a "race?" The KKK seems to think it represents some pure division of a "race," and acts almost as if it were one all by itself. Or, if any credence at all were to be given to the Nazi ideas about "race" and the notion that there is such a thing as a "Jewish race," why couldn't some other fanatic quite seriously propose that there is a "race" of Southern Baptists, or a "race" of NRA members, and so on?

Words and the ideas they represent have consequences; big ones, not to be taken lightly. If we are to gain a handle on the problems of "racism" in this country or anywhere, we are going to have to settle on exactly what we mean by "race," and it will have to be something a great deal more clear and definitive than the pitiful, muddled, ragged reference we cling to now. It would serve best, I think, if we did the logical thing and equated it with species; then I could say again without fear of contradiction by some nitpicker with a less admirable agenda, there is only ONE human race, and we are all part of it, one family overall, and it's high time we began behaving that way.

## Young Preston Handsome Honored for His Heroic Act

Like I've said several times before in this column, there are some things about serving on the City Council I love, and some that I'm not so keen on.

Tuesday I had the opportunity to present a City of St. Joseph Achievement Award to Preston Handsome--a 13 year-old 7th-grader at Spring Garden Middle School.

Mayor Ken Shearin, who wrote and signed the award had to go out of town and asked me to present it, since it was in my district.

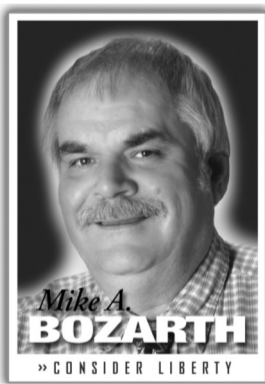
It's not often we are called on to honor a real-life hero. And a hero he is.

On Friday, January 8, 2010 at 8:30 am, Preston Handsome noticed his neighbor, William Taylor, struggling to get out of his burning home near Lake Contrary. With no thought for his own safety, Preston ran, in his bare feet, to help Mr. Taylor and dragged him to safety.

Unfortunately, Mr. Taylor passed away later from second and third-degree burns over most of his body at a Kansas City hospital (his obituary is on page 9 in this issue).

The fact remains that young Preston saw his neighbor in need and cared enough to do something about it. He ran to rescue his handicapped neighbor--in his bare feet on a harsh winter

morning. He suffered minor burns to his forearms and cold exposure to his feet. He braved the fire to help the man to safety.



To tell you the truth, I kind of felt unworthy to be the one to even present him the award.

At a pep rally Tuesday at Spring Garden, the band got the students excited and the principal called on Preston to come down from the stands. Their cheerleaders made a tunnel for Preston to run through on his way up for the presentation.

"The City of St. Joseph is honored to pay tribute to Preston, whose compassion and genuine commitment to

the welfare of other human beings is a source of inspiration to his fellow students and residents of this community," I read from the award.

Then I introduced Fire Chief Mike Dalsing, who presented Preston with a firemen's helmet, signed by every firefighter who fought the tragic Lake Contrary area fire. The Mayor and the City Council also signed the helmet that Chief Dalsing gave Preston. Several members of the St. Joseph Fire Department were present to show respect.

As I watched Preston, he was clearly embarrassed and humbled by all of the attention.

Next, firefighter Shawn Henderson gave him a "Fire" ball cap, a fireman's statue and congratulated the young man for his efforts.

Preston said he would do it again if he had the change. Now Preston wants to be a fireman.

## Article by

## Duane Thies

It is with pride this week that we are running an article by Duane Thies as our lead story on page one.

Long-time *Telegraph* readers will remember Duane, who covered local events for this newspaper for probably a decade or more.

He first worked for Scott Johnson, who established and was the first publisher of *The Saint Joseph Telegraph*. He also wrote for both *The Telegraph* and *The Savannah Reporter* for Guy and Leslie Specman.

Duane, who is now a substitute teacher for the St. Joseph School District, will submit articles to the *Telegraph* on an occasional basis.

Over the years Duane has earned respect in this and other communities for his accurate and honest news articles.

## » VERSE of the WEEK

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem!  
Your light has come, the glory of  
the Lord shines upon you. See,  
darkness covers the earth and thick  
clouds cover the peoples; but upon  
you the Lord shines, and over you  
appears His glory. Nations shall  
walk by Your light, and Kings by  
Your shining radiance.

—ISAIAH 60:1-3

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### CLINICAL SCREENINGS:

- CHOLESTEROL • BLOOD GLUCOSE
- BLOOD PRESSURE

MONDAY - FRIDAY | 8:30 - 6:00 PM  
SATURDAY | 8:30 - 2:00 PM

David R. Stevenson, R.Ph.  
Deanne Jungbluth, Pharm.D., R.Ph.