

## Letters to the Editor

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In the last ten years or so, there has been a sad confusion of terms and the psychological ideas from which they have arisen. Healthy shame, for example, and pathological - sick - shame, are not the same thing at all. The function of healthy shame is a part of our conscience, what Joyce called "the agenbite of inwit" or nipping of our inner wisdom, the still small voice. It is, in part, educated into us by the family and the society to which we belong, which recognizes certain rules of behaviour and makes infractions payable through consequences. Pathological shame is no longer about what we have done, but rather has twisted conscience to believe that it is who we are that is unacceptable. This has stretched to include the idea of "embarrassment" as some sort of abuse. Embarrassment is what we

have all felt on a new job, in a new place or trying something we've never done before. It is a sign that we are stretching our boundaries or in other terms, we are learning. As I tell my students again and again: There's nothing wrong with mistakes! On the contrary, if you aren't making mistakes, you aren't learning.

These distortions have created a victim culture in this country which can only sink us further into the abyss of pettiness, spite and lawsuits, which, to my mind, look exactly like "I'm gonna tell my Mommy on you! And you'll see then!" A pattern which continues to avoid responsibility until there is no one left on whom we can blame our failures.

What happens when these "sensitive" children go out into the real world? Into the military (God forbid!), or into the struggles of the everyday life we all

know? I can give you one answer. They are the millions of workers who arrive late, take extended breaks, "forget" a few numbers in the important data they are taking down, and even crash their cars into those of innocent people and then answer, "Whaateverr." Again and again, these spoiled children abdicate their responsibilities and cause innumerable mistakes, delays and even disasters. If they haven't been taught to care early on, to carry their minds a little further into the future and to see the consequences of what they do, they may answer as did one of my students when I asked him what he wanted to do "when he grows up" (gets out of high school). "I want to win the Lottery," said Jimmy.

Forgive me for going on to such lengths. I didn't intend to write so much, but the passion I have brought to this letter is a

glimpse of the passion I bring to learning, to teaching and to everything I do.

**Carol Sawyer**  
(temporarily advanced-  
placement Spanish teacher  
Vernonia High School

P.S. Let me clarify that an "expatriate" is not an "ex-patri-

ot." On the contrary, from the Latin "ex" for "outside" and "patria" for "country", the average expatriate, an American living, or as in my own case, and that of several generation of my ancestors, perhaps even born and bred on foreign soil, may have the deepest and most patriotic of American roots.



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