

Sue Thompson's Be**exceptional**

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Keep It To Yourself, Please

I spend an amount of time on Facebook—not a lot; just enough to check in and see what's going on with friends, wish someone a happy birthday, and enjoy a video or article someone has posted. I stay relatively up-to-date, but I don't respond to invitations to participate in games. I don't re-post to prove I've changed a setting because someone is concerned about privacy (such little procedures are frequently based on uninvestigated and erroneous information) or because they want me to engage in some sort of ritual to show my support.

There is the routine semi-inspirational quote or comment; the people who use Facebook for virtually nothing else but to market themselves, their products, their accomplishments, and their busy schedules; and the relentless selfies from my younger, self-absorbed acquaintances, particularly young women who attempt the seductive facial expression that will tell us all how incredibly hot they are, as though we must know.

What saddens me is the posting of deeply personal information. My unwise "friends" who are several generations behind me (and some in my age group who have never grown up) sometimes engage in fighting with each other on Facebook, and it's astonishing to me as I know they live in the same town, the same neighborhood—yea, even in the same house, and I ask myself in honest incredulity, are people this crazy? Are they really unable to be physically present with someone else and have a disagreement? Why in the world play out your grievances in social media?

I know this has been written about before. We are immersed in a world in which people consider their feelings, their opinions, and their deepest thoughts worthy not only of scrutiny and public discussion, but they see it as their right and obligation to speak loudly, frequently, and with a belligerence that suggests we dare not disagree. A commercial on television for some electronic product, I think, urges viewers to "find your voice," "speak out," and several other platitudes that always make me shake my head. Can it be there are people left who haven't found their voices? It feels to me like we can't stop the tsunami of self-appointed activists and spokespersons who demand we listen. Surely every human being on the planet has gotten the message they have a voice.

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I'm only being a little facetious, because I'm not suggesting there aren't stories that need to be told and exposed. To be made aware of the forgotten who truly don't have way to speak so others will hear, the overwhelming dilemmas about which we can do nothing, and the good that makes us feel as though there is still hope for humanity is the reason curiosity is a character strength. Expressing opinion in a fashion designed to engage, inspire, or provoke to serious thought (which is certainly my hope with this piece) is what thinkers do—write about issues. That's public discourse, if you expand the idea to more than just politics and law to mean plain old discourse that goes on in public, sharing opinions that actually advance ideas.

But the appalling foolishness of folks who get into what reads like a heated argument is disturbing. I admit there are times I have been sucked in myself because of the influence of the lack of restraint shown in such a forum; truth be told, I'm appalled by my own self. An instructor in my clinical psych program once described a narcissist as being encased in a very fragile egg that is completely covered on the inside with mirrors. Have we turned into a culture of narcissism, as some have claimed? I think so, particularly when I see that photo of the two of you demonstrating a French kiss, which is helpful, since I never see it done on television nearly every single night. I appreciate the message, whatever it is. I'll let you know when I figure it out.

It's one thing to be newsy, share life events and photos, enjoy each other's comments, offer our condolences and our congratulations. Quite another thing is the vacuous, shallow, constant and perennial pouring out of one's insides. We reveal an ugly pride when we always have to tell people our stand on an issue or assert our knowledge. Half the time (or maybe more), they're not listening anyway, because we're all in love with our own viewpoints. Can't we let things go without responding to them? And why do some feel compelled to educate everyone? Just a quick glance on my Facebook status update and I can find one guy who has waxed long and then even longer on Lee Harvey Oswald and the lone gunman theory (this under a JFK quote), and another on sex trafficking that purports to instruct me about the kind of men who buy women and why a particular campaign against it is ineffective. Good Lord, people, IT'S FACEBOOK. It's not the editorial page of the New York Times.

Our thoughts are the last and only thing the government or anyone else has no right to. Will it kill us to keep some of them to ourselves, not just on Facebook but elsewhere in general? Honest to goodness, silence—in more ways than one—really is golden. Let's make ourselves rich in it.

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YOUR

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CHARACTER Is SHOWING



Loyalty to a petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul.

~ Mark Twain

Silence is only frightening to people who are compulsively verbalizing.

~ William S. Burroughs

Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving us wordy evidence of the fact.

~ George Eliot

About Sue

Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her presentation skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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