

Racial Reconciliation in Gallup

Written by By Richard Kontz
Friday, 26 May 2017 03:49



Part 1 of 2

Dear Editor:

With all the recent controversy regarding the removal of Larry Casuse memorial by the City, I have been thinking about whether to say anything or not. I know “racism” is a touchy issue to talk about because most people like to believe it doesn’t exist anymore.

Anyway, it reminded me of a book I read in March of 2008 written by a man named Edward Gilbreath. The book is called “Reconciliation Blues.” He was writing about what he saw in the segment of society known as White Evangelical Christianity, which has had its share of problems with “integration”.

He told of how on his first Pastoral assignment he and his wife took an associate Pastor position in an upper White middle class church. He and his family settled into an all -white Neighborhood for this new undertaking.

His first day driving to and from the Church he was stopped by the police four times. Each time he was asked to get out of the car at gun point and told to spread eagle for a body search. It took several months for the local authorities to realize that a Black family lived in the “all-white” neighborhood and that the nice car he was driving wasn’t stolen. This is just one of many

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examples he gives in his book.

As I think about the City of Gallup, historically the “Indians” were always welcome to come in to dance, trade, shop and then go home. The “drinking” was okay as long as they bought the booze and went home to drink rather than stay in Gallup and hang around. Times have changed now that 43 to 45% of the people who live in Gallup are “Indians.” So, what I see is happening here is long time City folks, the business community and our government leaders have a major “integration dilemma” to deal with. I have been saying for 6 years that there needs to be a “vision” for the City of Gallup which takes that into consideration. I have yet to hear anything of substance presented by our local leadership, unless you consider the “Tourism Branding Study” as an attempt to re-define Gallup to make it more “friendly to tourists”.

There will be friction because having the “Indians” come and visit to trade and shop but not stay is not the same as “welcoming” them as your neighbor who may be living next to you.

Going back to Gilbreath’s book as I read this book it was a hard thing for me to do. Why?? But, I could definitely relate.

When I was a young boy about 10 years of age, I remember we used to go home after school and watch afternoon “Cowboys and Indians” shows. So, one day on the playground during recess, several kids decided to play “Cowboys and Indians.” I wanted to be the Cowboy who saved the damsel in distress, but one of the little girls who was the prettiest [and was White] said no that won’t work you’re a “dirty rotten red skin” so you have to be one of the “red savages.” That was my first real experience with blatant racial stereotyping. After that I didn’t play with that group of kids anymore.

Does this type of things still happen? Well, let’s see – yesterday I heard grade school boy [who was Hispanic] say to another grade school girl [who was Anglo] – “if you don’t leave me alone I am going to take off my belt and beat you, white girl”. Oh, boy who taught him that?

To be continued next week.

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