

## Anti-racism letters in the Benicia Herald

Sunday, May 2, 2021, by C. Bart Sullivan, Esq.

### A World Without Prejudice Requires Vigilance

Looking back on my early childhood, race was never a factor in whom I chose to play with. I was innocent. I just enjoyed playing with other children no matter their race, sexual orientation, weight, sex, religious beliefs, etc. We just played and enjoyed each other's company. People were just people. It was wonderful, and I believe a model for a society ultimately free of racism and bigotry.

I now ask myself, where and when did prejudicial thoughts sneak into my life? At what point did the innocence go away and society's prejudices try to infect my way of thinking? Looking back, I think it started once I thought that in order to be accepted, I had to conform to the beliefs of the group I wanted to join, otherwise I would be rejected. The fear of being rejected incentivized me to adopt the group's prejudices and beliefs. Luckily, I was raised in a loving home with parents that encouraged me to have lots of friends, with no mention of whom I should not be friends with.

In addition, there were countervailing forces in my life that helped me avoid prejudicial groups and people. One of those wonderful life influences was my scoutmaster. Our Boy Scout troop was made up of many different ethnic groups and cultures. Our scoutmaster made sure that everyone was included in the activities. He was kind and loving, but firm and vigilant in quelling any prejudice that started to form. He also taught us to have empathy for others. When one scout could not do a task or felt alone or left out, he made sure that as a group we understood what was happening, and how we could help. I can't tell you what a profound impression that made on me.

With that foundation, as I grew older, I began to be attracted to diverse groups of people. This eventually led me to my love of travel and joy in meeting and learning more about different races, cultures, religions, political views, and ways of life different from my own.

While I found through my travel, as expected, that prejudice and racial biases are prevalent throughout the world, I also found, but didn't really expect, that people who were vigilant in improving their empathy toward others were more inclusive and worked to eliminate the disease of prejudice. I believe that is the key issue here today.



Black lives matter to me because, based on my foundation, people are just people, just like from my childhood. I feel empathy for the injustice non-white people have undergone and continue to undergo at the hands of those whose foundation and beliefs were formed from privilege, prejudice, racism, and a lack of empathy. Thus, just like my scoutmaster taught us, I need to help. Prejudice and racism must end.

Unlike Mr. Livesay, who appears from his Sunday April 25 letter, to be more of a stork sticking his head in the sand than an Owl, we must be vigilant. We must teach and encourage everyone, especially our children, to build a personal foundation that encourages empathy, and that avoids prejudice and racism, because prejudice, especially racism, is everywhere and insidious, even in Benicia, and must be eradicated from humanity.

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Benicia