From **Manners, Morals, Customs, and Public Perception**

Judge Paul Heath Till

Sidney, Texas

July 2001

I was brought up to follow these basic rules in dealing with others in public and private:

1. Be mindful of my dress in public.  How I dress is a direct evaluation of me by me and how I carry my family name for all others to see.  Never bring discredit or dishonor to the family name.  Slovenly dress discredits the family name.
2. Show courtesy and respect to all others at all times.  Do not think of yourself but keep your mind on the people you meet and deal with.
3. Be thoughtful and careful in my speech in the presence of women and children.  There is no reason to make others uncomfortable or embarrassed by using profane, obscene, or vulgar speech.  This is thoughtless and does not do credit to any man.  … The point is that they have not heard profane, obscene, or vulgar speech from me.  That is to make it clear that I disapprove and do not engage in such conduct in the presence of women and children.
4. All Southern women are ladies and are to be shown deference and respect.  If no male member of her family was present than it was your responsibility as a gentleman to see that this rule was followed.
5. It was the absolute moral responsibility of every man to protect and defend all ladies and children.  This was one of the basic reasons that the Southern gentleman was to be armed. …
6. Be very slow and careful in making a promise and be quick and diligent in keeping your word and fulfilling all promises made.  ‘A promise made is a debt to be paid’ was not a trite cliché.  An outside intervening force unforeseeable and beyond control, was the only way anyone could discharge his obligation and duty to a promise made without fulfilling it.  Many pined for the time when a man’s word was his bond.  This rule personified that time.

Other basic instructions and examples that the above rules are based on are:

1. ‘Please’ and ‘thank you’ were the words heard in profusion, in public and in private.  The use of ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ requires that you think of the other person. If you use ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ to the point where it becomes a habit each will soon come to discover that they are, in fact, thinking of others.  It is well shown that conduct can and will change attitudes.
2. Adults were not called by their first name in public except in special and unusual conditions and then only by another adult that had a long and close relationship, never by a child or young adult.  To do so would have been disrespectful and unseemly to the status of the person addressed.
   1. To a child or to an adult everyone older was Mister or Miz or whatever title they had (Doctor, Judge, Sheriff or the like) and family name, or the preferred Miz for ladies, which covered you if you did not know whether or not the lady was married. The use of the first name is … [a] disregard of status and family.
   2. Did I say status?  Well, status and the recognition of status was a basic and important part of Southern manners and custom.  The present existing yankee culture is egalitarian from top to bottom.  What is pushed and held up as the norm is egalitarianism [classlessness].  The main means of destruction of the Southern Culture is by replacing or substituting egalitarianism for a hierarchical form of culture.
3. When I grew up the family was of prime importance.  It identified you with your family, both present and past.  It gave more than just a name; it gave you connection with all of your kin.  In private social gatherings, adults, if they knew each other well and had some prior relationship (went to school together, belonged to the same lodge, the same church, the same family, etc.) would call each other by their first or, as it was the called, their given name.  But even in this setting the obviously older person was still addressed as Mr or Mrs and their last name.  Within the family they were called by the appropriate family title (uncle, aunt, etc.) and then their given name.
4. ‘Yes Sir,’ ‘No Sir,’ ‘Yes Ma’am’ and ‘No Ma’am’ were words sprinkled throughout my conversation as appropriate for the existing circumstance.
5. I have not attempted to go into the conduct of a gentleman toward a lady in such things as standing the first time a lady enters a room, or when an older person enters a room.  The practice of letting a lady go first and holding the door are just visible effects of following the above rules of conduct.