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## 'Be Nice to People' – Grandmother's Advice Could Fix Many of World's Problems

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## ‘Be Nice to People’ – Grandmother’s Advice Could Fix Many of World’s Problems

By Anthony Major  
UCF Forum columnist  
Wednesday, June 26, 2015

As I began to write this column, my ears were ringing with the news story of another senseless shooting. This time it’s of nine people at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C.

It hit particularly close to home as it is the same denominational church my family helped start in Sarasota, Fla., and that I was raised in.

I remember all the Sunday school lessons, choir rehearsals, youth leagues, etc. during the week, and all-day church services on Sunday, the most segregated day in America. But never, back before integration, did we ever worry about anyone coming in, day or night, and shooting any of us. Not even walking to and from home to church. The church was a sacred place.

Makes you wonder whatever happened to the teachings of love, respect and honor we got in all our places of worship, schools and homes?

I will never forget the words of my grandmother - as I was leaving home to move to New York City - that ring in my ears today: “Be nice to people.” A simple four words, but if learned, remembered, respected and followed would put a lot of these senseless killings to rest. Now she didn’t say be nice to only blacks or whites or any other people of a different culture. She said “Be nice to *people*.” I took that to mean *all* people and have tried to live my life accordingly.

This young white man in Charleston, who was charged with this senseless act, obviously acted out of his biased stereotype based on a perception of a group of people having certain traits - whether they have them or not. He therefore acted out of a perceived position of power that he could change that condition by ridding the world of a few blacks. Perception is not reality, it is flexible! You can change it. However, he never gave himself a chance to.

He harbored dangerous, twisted thoughts, and then made a choice to act out those thoughts. We have to be responsible for the choices we make and actions we take, whether it is Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Osama bin Laden - or here in the United States, slave owners, KKK members, a small number of bad police officers and others like the man arrested in Charleston.

I agree with Jon Stewart's summation of the Charleston issue in one of his recent commentaries on The Daily Show:

<http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/kb2h42/charleston-church-shooting>.

Also, this week one of my students sent me a social media link that is one part of his communication pipeline. He said he and others watch and participate as young folks express themselves. Those on the site were talking about all the killings and trying to find solutions. They say that it is remarkable how the blacks in the group, with a few others of different cultures, even though they continue to be wronged, keep forgiving and praying for peace, even after a senseless shooting like this.

The students I spoke to say they listen and participate in discussions about these issues that affect them and are trying to figure out a solution.

However, today's youths often feel that people in power care more about insignificant issues than about what is happening to their age group and especially to young men of color, unless they burn something down.

As director of Africana Studies at UCF, it is my responsibility to see that our campus is aware of how our students are feeling about these issues and hopefully, we as a campus

community, try to live up to the university president's goal of diversity and inclusiveness.

Sometimes parts of my world from decades ago seemed better than today, and sometimes it becomes very difficult to see any justice - but my life's work is to keep trying so that my children and everybody's children can grow up in a better world than the one I grew up in.

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