

Civil War

by Mike Harris

When the topic for the week was announced it consisted of two words "civil" and "war". The person announcing said not necessarily "THE" Civil War of the middle 1800s that tore our country apart. That left the door open to the imagination. The word "civil" according to the dictionary "observing or befitting accepted social usage, proper, polite". The reason I looked it up was because I am recently from an inner city and CIVIL was not a part of my every day experience.

WAR I did not have to look up because more than three years from 1942 to 1946 makes me an authority on the word "WAR". The words are direct opposites ... war implies anger, contentious behavior, physical violence, blood, and death, which is not very polite or accepted proper behavior! So the question arises ... how do these words come together and how does the meaning of one import on the other? Is there really such a thing as polite death – polite contentious war? We are social creatures, we tend to congregate in herds, and under circumstances that promote civility.

War on the other hand, is domination and denial of polite accepted behavior. After thinking about it, I decided this had to be reduced in scope, to a more manageable size, so lets try a size that we are all familiar with ... the family. Civil war within the family. I will try to talk within these constraints, since civil war within the family typically does not lead to blood and death! A family unit starts with two people. If they are polite, not contentious and respectful of each other, then there are no grounds for "civil war". As the family expands and the pressure of additional individuals implodes on the two, which can increase to three or more, polite and accepted behavior have to be implemented-sometimes leading to dominance and unacceptable behavior. HA! THE SEEDS OF "CIVIL WAR".

I do not know of any people who upon deciding to become the nucleus of a family deliberately tried to take a course in what I call "parenting", so most if not all come to this stage unequipped. A lot are like General Patton, conquerors indifferent to the destructive wake of their success. But then there are also the "Lincolns" who also succeed, but do not humiliate. They leave the door ajar for self respect. In a family with a "General Patton" who dominates by physical force, there is usually an undercurrent of continuing rebellion, and recurring strife. In contrast, where the door is left ajar for the loser in the stressful war to recoup some vestige of self respect, there can be a return to civility.

War seems to be natural to the human species, necessary to promote survival of the fittest, the strong and the smart. Civility allows for recouping and the peaceful expansion of progressive thought and endeavor and so the term "civil war" makes some sense.

Now let us expand the nuclear family to a geographical area in which a larger group can be called "family", a country in which a large number of nuclear families reside. Here there are a lot more General Patton's who by their very nature are more aggressive, vociferous, and are prone to violence who try to dominate the Lincolns. Hence within the geographic area, the larger families [country] resort to war. Within this group whose civility is disrupted, we now have war – CIVIL WAR. There is nothing CIVIL [polite, socially acceptable] about it – it is WAR and if the Lincolns do not prevail, there remain for a very long time the seeds of rebellion and strife, and CIVIL WAR.