

Twentee-Twunny Teen Vision

It was the first day of high school. Mr. Pellant passed out our text books and instructed us to turn to the inside cover where each book was numbered with a black marker. He gave the standard speech about not losing your book, or you would be fined. If you did not pay the fine, you would not get a report card, blah, blah, blah, graduate, blah, blah, blah. He then took roll call. When he called your name you were supposed to tell him your book number so he could record it.

Mine was twenty. I rehearsed it in my mind so as not to make a fool of myself on the first day of high school. “Twen-tee”. Or is it “Twun-nee”? I knew I would say “Twun-nee” normally, but this was not kid stuff anymore. This was high school. HIGH SCHOOL. And high school English class at that. This was the BIG times, baby. Certainly by high school we were expected to have perfected the pronunciation of the numbers one through twenty. I absolutely did not want the teacher to correct me. “Twun-nee” sounds so childish, or does it? “Twen-tee / Twun-nee.” “Twen-tee / Twun-nee.” I started feeling panicked, then horrified. Why couldn’t I get a normal number like everyone else? “Twen-tee / Twun-nee.”

“Steve Nelson,” the teacher interrupted. Mr. Pellant was a no-nonsense type of guy. He was short and stocky, and seemed somewhat athletic. His wife had taught me in middle school. She caught me lying to her once, and on another occasion made me move my desk to the very back of the class against the wall. She was the only teacher that had me pegged as a bad kid. I wondered if she had ever told her husband about me.

“Twen-tee,” I replied softly, hoping to avoid embarrassment. (I’m telling you, it sounded just like the way a French poodle would say it. I know they can’t talk, but imagine if they could. They would say, “Twen-tee,” just like that.)

“What?”

Oh Great... here we go. All eyes on me. “Twen-tee,” I responded, enunciating as clearly as I could, my nervousness only accentuating the French poodleishness.

“You mean ‘twUNNY’?” He seemed slightly agitated by my overly proper pronunciation.

“Yeah,” I replied sheepishly. That went just about as badly as possible. (Or is it “‘bad’ as possible”? I’m still trying to figure out English.)

That sounds pretty dumb now doesn’t it? NOBODY cares how you pronounce twenty. Looking back at it, I can’t even believe the teacher picked up on the difference. I’m sure

he doesn't remember the incident. No one does. No one, but me. Who in the world remembers the number of their high school English book? Why does it matter?

But it did matter. It mattered deeply. What my classmates thought of me meant the world to me, and their approval – my fate—all hung on that one dreadful number, or so it seemed.

I'm at a loss for words. Where do you go with that one? There is so much there. Do you see the significance of that story? It's a flashback to a different world—a time when we thought differently—when *everyone* thought differently. A zit was truly the end of the world—not figuratively, literally. IT WAS LITERALLY THE END OF THE WORLD. Between me and my classmates, the world literally ended thousands, if not millions, of times while I was growing up. I know that cannot be, but trust me, it did. Every embarrassment was the end of the world. Absolutely nothing else mattered. I would have sold my soul to the devil to hear the correct pronunciation of a single word. It was like the Twilight Zone. The slightest embarrassment could send us into emotionally cataclysmic contortions. And while we went through it all, we had to act as if none of it mattered to us. As the commercials said, "Never let them see you sweat." Even now we are permanently scarred. We still care what those people, those kids, thought of us and still think of us ten, twenty, thirty years later.

Kathleen says I am exaggerating. However, she has the uncanny gift of blacking out all unpleasant memories. Isn't that convenient? Trust me; high school is very much like this, but only to a high schooler. You know what they say, "Grownups do not understand." Could it be that they are right? Maybe we have all blocked it out.

Here are a few things to chew on:

1. Be compassionate toward your teen. Teens go through a lot. Treat them like you would want to be treated if you were in emotional upheaval.
2. Don't give them undue free reign just because they are going through a lot. We need to make good choices even when we are in the middle of tough times. This takes generous amounts of guidance and discipline.
3. Show your kids you love them. Help them see that God does as well. When you *know* you are loved by someone, you don't have to be loved by everyone.
4. Equip your kids to handle failure and to have perspective. Only on rare occasions does being embarrassed actually bring the world to an end.
5. Help them develop an identity that goes beyond a zit count, clothing styles, and being cool.
6. Teach them that regardless of what the dictionary says, the second 'T' in 'twenty' is silent. Only Leonard Nimoy would pronounce the second 'T'. And he is not cool.