

PONDERING THE LESSONS OF ELECTION DAY

The election this year has revealed a lot about human nature--not all of it good.

I had occasion this year to hold signs for a couple of candidates on Election Day and to observe others with the same ignoble duty. But the way some folk behaved, you would have thought we sign holders had the plague.

I certainly didn't expect everyone to vote for my candidates. That's just the nature and of the political process our forefathers fought and died for. But when the first sour person drove up to vote, I knew it would be a long day.

Ignoring my smile, she scowled at my sign and vigorously wagged her head in obvious disgust. But she was being peered upon--by the toddler in the back seat. I expect she'll see a puckered, drawn face again in about 12 or 13 years and wonder where her little darling acquired such a bitter disposition.

Then came a fellow trailing an aroma of stale smoke. In as foul a mood as the fumes that drifted behind him, he didn't even bother to grunt. His scowl was loud enough. What harm would there have been in smiling?

Wanting to be noticed, another lady tooled by with an energetic thumbs-down to another sign holder. Can't we disagree without being arrogant and offensive? Her rudeness neither helped her candidate nor hurt the one who won.

Then an older fellow inched up to a little girl with a sign. Rolling down the window of his long, expensive car, he hissed an epithet. Though obviously displeased at her choice of candidates, his venomous statement said more about him.

The rain and cold that night were indiscriminate, afflicting all of us, regardless of political leanings. I'm not sure why, but attitudes were noticeably better after the rain began and the ranks of sign holders dwindled to a hardy few. Perhaps there's something that unites us when we suffer together. Friendly waves and greetings, even from those of other persuasions, cheered us all.

But when the tallies were in, we found the nation to be sharply divided on moral and religious issues, a larger picture of what we sign holders saw on Election Day.

In his 1885 book "Warriors and Statesmen," John Lord wrote of the age into which Daniel Webster was born. "This age of progress had not arisen when everybody looks forward to a millennium of idleness and luxury, or to a fortune acquired by speculation and gambling rather than by the sweat of the brow. It was an age, in many important respects, justly extolled, especially for scientific discoveries and mechanical inventions. Yet it was an age not remarkable for religious earnestness or moral elevation."

Unless we can learn to pull together, we many find ourselves like the bygone generation: justly extolled, but not remarkable for religious or moral elevation. The heritage we leave our children will be partly determined by how we get along with those who disagree with us.