Sad

by

*Eyes Right*

**Key Largo, FL –** I received a “bolt-out-of-the-blue phone call while enjoying some relaxing Florida sunshine. It came from an area code associated with Cincinnati. I thought it might be my cousin calling, but when I answered, the voice on the other end seemed to be that of a young Black woman. Although she repeated her name several times, I was unable to understand.

She told me that she had found my name and contact information on Google and that she wants to be a writer. Based on a subsequent text to me, I learned that she had seen the PowerPoint presentation which I had recently given via Zoom to the OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) at the University of Cincinnati. I had given permission to OLLI to post my PowerPoint slides online, and this person had obviously found them along with my contact information.

Much of what the woman told me was at times incoherent (to me) although this may have been due to her dialect. She then sent me a text saying, “I thought I would apply for like being a writer so I can write on my own.” During our phone conversation, I told her that the best way to become a writer is to start writing. “Just put down your thoughts; you can always add punctuation, spelling, and grammar, but you may not later be able to capture those initial thoughts.”

The following day I received via a text message the following screenshot of her work:

*As you wish*

*I wish to tell you all your story is going to be a good story ladybug was a good princess she always live her lifestyle good and never going to try shake when she came famous and she always wanted to be a celebrity popular famous person but people use to pick on her and never say oh yeah you can’t do it like us stop winning your life and stop losing your life her life went downhill when she met this boy named Justin Justin was the name of the beach he couldn’t even play the beach he was playing soccer and basketball he met her at a mall they was going shopping one day they date went horrible she didn’t want to talk about it with her friends so she locked herself in the room treasure moment ladybug said I don’t know where I am going to go out with this story she said oh man he broke up with me Justin broke up with me and I would never forget him he’s a brain I cried in my pillow and run to my home kept running and someone said do you need help I said no man I would really cry my pillow and go back home and watch popcorn and watch me some Netflix*

What immediately struck me was that, in spite of zero punctuation and very bad grammar, there were no spelling errors – apparently her word processing program had corrected any misspelled words.

I chose not to reply immediately, but over the next 48 hours, I received five more equally incoherent screen shots involving ladybug and Justin. Each time I read them, I felt sorry for this woman because, assuming that she attended some levels of American education, she had been defrauded. Presumably, most who complete at least eight grades of primary school, should be able to write a few meaningful sentences.

I finally wrote a text back to the Cincinnati lady, mostly as an act of compassion. I complimented her on having some “interesting ideas” and recommended that she consider enrolling in a basic English course at a local community college to improve her writing style, basic grammar, and sentence structure. I also considered this to be closure on my end.

What remains in my mind is what can only be termed “language ignorance” in sectors of the American populace. I have no way of knowing how widespread this situation is in our nation. Obviously, this woman does know how to access information online and how to type, email, and text. But, when I compare her writing skills to those of American children educated through the 8th grade in one-room schoolhouses during The Great Depression, my reaction is great sadness.

I thought you might like to know.

E-R