

## HOW A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER FUMBLED

By J B Leftwich

We seem to be absolutely hypnotized by the S-word -- you know, the three-letter word that begins with "S" and ends with "X".

Newspapers and TV news probably have sex editors.

At any time now, you may see listed on some newspaper's staff, "Monica Jones, Sex Editor.

A six o'clock evening news program may change its name to "The Scene at Sex."

Our news sources have become so saturated with sex oriented stories that a newspaper in Springfield, Ill, declared a holiday and printed nothing about America's favorite subject.

It seems that in this "been there, done that" age the whole country would turn away and seek another diversion.

Not so. Radio talk shows are filled with discussions of sex, especially the Washington based sex story. Callers and talk show hosts engage in lurid and titillating discussions. Often male host, female caller.

No news is more exciting than stories of a young president and a 21-year-old female. Warren G. Harding, who reportedly engaged in the S-word action in a White House closet would be green with envy. His dalliance has received more publicity in latter years than it did during his administration.

Ah, but the news media are different in these days. Zillions of wannabe investigative reporters with zillions of TV cameras and microphones hound special prosecutors and defense attorneys.

Every news reporter seems to dream of becoming Bob Woodward, the Richard Nixon nemesis, and of bringing down the current office holder.

Not so the radical feminists. Not so the Anita Hill support group who hounded Clarence Thomas but failed to thwart his approval of his Supreme Court bid. In their devotion to a handsome white president, they have abandoned Monica Lewinsky. They have tossed her to the wolves many of whom have mikes and cameras.

Nevertheless, some good has come from our fascination with the sex lives of the rich and the famous in this decade: We have rescued a good word that once evoked side glances and titters. I am speaking of the word "intercourse."

“Sexual intercourse” has fallen from current vocabularies. This more polite term has been replaced with the word “sex”. Have you noticed? Nobody has suggested sexual intercourse between a president and an intern. It’s just simply and blatantly “sex”. Often, even more descriptive.

The generic word, “intercourse” was defined by Webster as “dealings or connections between persons, organizations, or governments, as in common affairs, civilities, or business; communication.” But even Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary in its 1957 edition felt compelled to add to the definition: “Sexual connection.”

Webster knew that common usage of the word “intercourse” had evolved into the more restrictive definition.

At the time, I did not know this.

In the mid-1950s, I taught a First Methodist Church Sunday Class in the old church building on East Main Street. I do not remember the subject of the lesson one fateful Sunday when it seemed appropriate to use the word “intercourse.” In its generic sense, of course.

The instant I used the word, I realized I had fumbled.

My Sunday School class, a bunch of middle aged Methodists, was not thinking “generic.” When I used the word, the class immediately thought “bedroom.”

There were side glances and smiles, mostly from the men, but a few of the women could not suppress a smile. Nobody laughed out loud. They were too polite for that. But their reaction was not lost on the teacher who had to summon all of his skills and experience to maintain his composure. indeed, the teacher himself was amused at his fumble.

I was before my time. In today’s environment, nobody would find the word “intercourse” suggestive. Even if the adjective “sexual” preceded it.

Any word short of gutter language likely would provoke little reaction.

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