
what's up doc?



by Dr. Mary Livers

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Hello, Everyone:

Well, I thought I knew everything about Louisiana cuisine til I was on the way to North Louisiana for a meeting, then on to Shreveport to spend Christmas with my family. On that recent trip I saw a number of raccoon stands. At first I thought people were selling the raccoons as pets. But I later realized the signs said raccoons AND sweet potatoes...and sweet potatoes do not make good pets. I've eaten squirrel and deer, and pigs feet, but I confess I have never eaten nutria. Not yet, anyway. And, I have yet to eat raccoon, with or without sweet potatoes. I guess I have a lot to learn about Louisiana cuisine after all.

I've been thinking about civility. Civility means treating one another with respect and decency, making an effort to preserve the dignity of others. By the time he was 16, George Washington had copied by hand, 110 *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*, based on a set of rules composed by French priests in 1595. So people have been thinking about civility for a long time.

Today some of the rules sound old fashioned. It would be easy to say they are outdated, but they reflect ideas that are often difficult to find in today's world. The common focus is on other people rather than our own self-interests. These rules are more than just manners, they are the small sacrifices that we should all be willing to make for the good of all and the sake of living together. My mother always said good manners never go out of style. Here goes, to name just a few of The Rules: "Honesty, integrity, and respect for all will guide my personal conduct. I will embrace and celebrate differing perspectives intellectually. I will build an inclusive community enriched by diversity. I am willing to respect and assist those individuals who are less fortunate. I promise my commitment to civic engagement and to serve the needs of the community to the best of my ability."

Maybe the world could use a few less promises to lose weight and a few more promises to be civil. Maybe all of us would be better off if we focused on the small things we can do to create more civility in our lives. Like letting somebody in front of you in that horrible Baton Rouge traffic. Take a minute to write a thank-you note. Or hold the door open in the rain for somebody who does not have an umbrella. Or letting somebody get in front of you in the shopping line, who has only two items, when you have 15. Or just being a really good listener. Just something to think about – the small gift of civility. If anybody is thinking about a New Year's resolution, how about considering making the world more civil. It's got to be easier than losing weight.

So, this is the final *What's Up, Doc?* for 2009. Sorry this is coming out so late in the day. As you have seen in earlier emails, we are facing hard decisions and challenging times. It's been quite a year for me, for our agency, and for our state and nation. 2010 promises to be another eventful year. Let's stay focused on our mission and let's support one another in good times and bad. Wishing each of you a very happy New Year, with my thanks for all you do to meet the mission, year in and year out.

Sincerely, "Doc" *Dr. Mary Livers*

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