

## To Prejudice (2015)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I don't know how to handle prejudice, and the anger buried deep within it.

You know how the situation arises: You're having a casual conversation with someone, maybe a family friend, sometimes a relative, but most often a stranger. In the middle of the pleasant talk they come out with one of those offhand, breathtaking obscenities, using one of those terms by which we used to refer to groups before we knew how much it hurts them and us. Your daughter looks up at you with a question in her eyes, and you gulp and stammer before cowardice conquers you once again.

I had a golden opportunity years ago. In the airplane seat ahead of me sat a studious young man who looked like Saulman's Jesus in cut-off jeans and a tie-dyed shirt. The man beside me was offended by the way the boy was studying a textbook on Asian religion, and when we landed he got off. "Shouldn't let 'em on the planes," the guy in the other seat muttered. "Oughta make him hitch-hike, so he could be with his own kind."

Then he said the word: "Lazy Obscenities."

"Naw," I responded, "Shouldn't let them hitch-hike. Ought to round them up into one place, keep them in camps or something. That's what the Germans would have done."

He was startled for a moment but recovered quickly. "Yeah," he said, "That would do it." Then he turned his attention to the airline magazine he was reading, called "The American Way."

Hence my question: did I really say that to him, or did I just wish I had? What can you say when they use Those Words? Confront, reason, chide, or use humor, like Mark Twain? Success stories are solicited. For prizes I'm going to offer a pound of Brazil nuts, and one of those sling-shots made from a tree fork and straps of rubber inner-tubing. I forget what it was we used to call them.

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