**Social Conventions**

“Everyone has a handicap; some handicaps are more visible than others.”

I was born to two deaf parents and with a congenital disease that causes my skin to blister upon certain contact situations that involve heat, friction or heavy usage (for example, wearing shoes on a hot day). Those conditions have made the adherence to social conventions not necessarily a routine reaction.

** How are you? What is happening? How is it going?**

 Fifty years ago, these types of questions were not common in my social circles, but now they seem to be obligatory everywhere. However, when I learned Spanish in school, “como esta “ was taught as a standard greeting. My son, Andy, says that the only possible response is “good” in any language. This interaction therefore becomes completely useless for information interchange. Nobody dares to actually honestly answer the question, and it is not anyone’s business anyway. For many people, language is difficult and trying to respond takes effort for no gain. Besides, what language should the question be in?

** Applause.**

 I was at a meeting at the Los Angeles Air Force Base to celebrate the success of the infra-red satellite project. There were many short speeches and congratulations for many people. After each one of these announcements, there was a round of applause. For me, the process is called “banging hands together” and is somewhat injurious to the skin of the hands. I declined to participate in the routine applause. Much to my horror, the meeting was televised, and there I was, not applauding each time everyone else did. My manager at the time may have felt that I was not a team player or disapproved because of my non-action. My opinion is that routine applause is a waste of time and noisy.

** Standing Ovations!**

 OUCH! Although this is a nice way to show appreciation, it combines applause with the act of standing up. Since whenever I am sitting somewhere, I tend to take off my shoes, and recently, getting up is quite difficult, the act of standing takes way too much anticipation and may be a foot hazard. The fact that I do not stand up should not mean that I do not approve of the celebrated activity. I do try to prepare for the mandatory stand up for the flag and national anthem. However, I have no singing ability.

** How is the family?**

* If you do not know specifically who the family is and what their names are, why should this question be asked? I have learned that this question from people who do not know is a convenient way of avoiding what the real conversation should be about. Such people are usually managers or business associates that are trying to avoid some useful (but maybe embarrassing) topic. Therefore, anyone who uses this question is instantly on my enemy list. The answer is none of their business.

** Mumbling speech, hand in front of face, talking behind back.**

* Some people have hearing issues. Deaf people can only read lips. All of these features make it difficult to be properly understood by persons with auditory issues. It is best to directly face the recipient of information and speak clearly without obstacles between the involved parties. Dark or candle light (ugh, air pollution) restaurants are especially bad for lip reading and sign language.

** Discussions of health issues/appearance.**

* Some people have casts, personal defects, or are using a cane. Does everyone have to comment on this or use this for conversation? The following questions are repetitive and insensitive: 1. How did you get that cast? 2. Why are you deaf and dumb? 3. What is that cane/wheelchair for? Such inquiries are demeaning and prejudicial. These types of questions are usually inappropriate or none of your business!

** Comments on attire! That really looks nice/ugly.**

* These types of comments say more about the speaker than the wearer. They are a form of social pressure to appear in a certain conventional way. I have heard a ship cruise director state that Speedos on men are offensive to him (to applause), while small bikinis on women are attractive. Then there is always the negative attire implication for even a few or many overweight pounds. If I wear orange, I hear comments about being a fan of San Francisco Giants, Syracuse, Tennessee, or Texas. (All false!)