

Is You Is or Is You Ain't?

by John Farrow

Recently our President had a little trouble with the word "is," something he would never have experienced had he been in Mrs. Dorothea Carpenter's sixth grade English class. No, Mrs. Carpenter ruled that class with an iron fist, or at least a very solid wooden ruler poised over a trembling knuckle lest it stray from its appointed conjugations.

"John Edwin," she would say in a stern voice clearly designed to be heard several doors down the hall (that was a dead give-away right there of how much trouble I was in because no one ever used my middle name except my mother and my grandmother, and then only after I had pushed things to the brink of a spanking to end my sitting-down days for the better part of a week). "John Edwin, if you don't want to spend next semester down in the B Class, you had better start learning your verb tenses."

Oh, the shame of it all! This was back in the days before the touchy-feely do-gooders imposed upon schools to please not push the little children too hard lest their self-esteem be hurt. But shame was a very powerful motivator in those days.

It's really not that difficult and doesn't require outwitting a vast right-wing conspiracy, either. According to Mr. Webster, "is" is the present tense third person singular of "be," meaning *to have an objective existence, the same connotation as, identity with, or equality of meaning*. In other words, either "is" is "is" or "is" is not, and if "is" is not "is," just what can "is" be?

If "is" is "was" that would also mean that "was" was "is" which "was" is not. "Is" is not "were" because if "is" was "were" then "was" would be "is" and we already know that "was" is not "is."

On the other hand, "is" could be "are" but plural is not "is" and if "is" was not "were" and "is" is not "are" just what else can "is" be but "is"?

Runners, of course, simply do not have the same problem as the President. They generally have no doubt of their objective existence and the importance that running plays in that existence. Descartes defined the human condition most succinctly: "I think, therefore I am." A runner might well add the corollary: "I run, therefore I am."

In fact, the two go hand in hand. The essence of being a runner extends far beyond the sum total of its parts, of the miles put in on the track, the long runs, the races. No, despite the many physical benefits of running, the process of becoming a runner is really more mental than any other as the mind learns to cast off all the artificial limits that we seem to unconsciously place upon ourselves. Once past that initial threshold, however, each new experience helps to develop a mind-set of positive reinforcement, of believing in oneself, that reaffirms, over and over, and regardless of the situation, "I can."

The true being of a runner is not so much the physical strength or endurance built up over the years, but the development of the mind and its ability to unleash heretofore untapped resources within the body, whatever the venture, to continue, to persevere, to achieve, to succeed, to be.

It is this inner power that extends into the very spirit and brings peace to the soul that enables the runner to reach out and draw from the deepest reserves to meet whatever challenges lie ahead. Not surprisingly, runners are constantly extending themselves, achieving more than they ever thought possible at everything that they try. All that is necessary is to decide to take the first step.

Perhaps the Bard said it best: "To be or not to be. That is the question."

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