

## Prisoners

*Posted: Tuesday, December 31, 2013*

“From the moment I could talk, I was ordered to listen”

It is going to take a little work to get through this first paragraph—no music or poetry, just one foot in front of the other. I was thinking about the virus that inadvertently wiped out all the survivalists as I watched a film called Prisoners. [For those who have seen the film, I admit I am compressing data but I am not suppressing truth.] Two children were kidnapped. There were two “obvious” suspects—both were young men with severe socialization issues (think Boo Radley). Neither suspect could talk (well, they could talk but not communicate). Both were suspects because they were odd, could not communicate and tried to run away when approached by authority. Both were taken prisoner and tortured by authority to get them to talk. Neither of them kidnapped the two kids. Turns out they had both been kidnapped and held prisoner as young boys (thus explaining why they were odd and unable to communicate). The same person who kidnapped them had kidnapped a bunch of kids—including the two children taken at the beginning of the film—but the actual kidnapper was not an important character in the film. The two main characters were the father of one of the kidnapped children and the lead detective. The father took one suspect prisoner and tortured him to get him to talk. That suspect survived and was reunited with his real family. The detective took the other suspect into custody and brutally interrogated him—until he managed to kill himself while in custody. The two children were “freed” in the end, but the two who were Chatty Cathy’s at the beginning of the film were now effectively mute. At the end of the film the father was shot by the real kidnapper and imprisoned. He could not talk (or at least he could not be heard because he was buried in a pit). He would bleed to death if no one freed him and the kidnapper was dead so no one knew where he was. All he had was the plastic whistle he had given his daughter to use in an emergency. The detective hears the whistle as the screen fades to black.

There is more than irony going on here.

The dad was a survivalist. The film opens with him teaching his son to hunt because some day there will be a catastrophe and people will be eating each other. The lesson is: trust no one.

A recent poll says that trust is at an all time low for Americans. Fewer of us trust our fellow Americans than we did a generation ago.

Without trust, talk is just noise. At best, noise can be a signal—like a pink whistle. Communication requires trust. Without trust we remain isolated in a prison house of language... and we die alone.

Communication depends on a shared belief system. We have to trust that the person speaking to us is basically sane, essentially honest and shares a common perspective of what is real.

The following is a condensed excerpt from Grid:

*If we stand a computer in front of the Lincoln Memorial and if the computer has a camera, it can receive an image of the statue, including the text of the Gettysburg Address. If the computer does nothing more than store the received images, it will be diagnosed as autistic and the hard drive will soon be full... Since the computer file is generated by a camera, a sane computer with normal, mentally healthy software will recognize (code) the information as a graphic image. Those files can then be processed by software designed to organize, compress, edit and selectively delete the coded information. A word processor could incorporate the image into a text file and edit the picture by changing its size and shape, but since it does not recognize the symbols in the picture as text, it cannot edit the words. The information remains coded as pictures, not as words. The computer's analysis of the picture might create a stunning interpretation of the constituent parts and relations of the graphical images, reading the mind of the sculptor, but not the mind of the writer of the Gettysburg Address. Active intervention by a coder such as an OCR software application is required to recognize that part of the picture containing the Gettysburg Address and translate it into a text file. If the computer believes that the file is a text file, it will attempt to process the information in the file as text. If that belief is erroneous, if, for example, the file has been slightly altered to make it appear to be a text file when in fact it is a graphic file, the computer may appear demented or crazy and the attempt to communicate the information in the file will appear as gibberish. The computer's processing of information is dependent on this shared belief system. Part of the process of perception, part of seeing the forest, is the belief, based on communication with other conscious minds, that the particles received by the nervous system are 'commonly' (as 'in common') perceived to be a forest. Without that common belief system, the perceiving mind cannot see the forest for the trees. Perception filters, sorts, organizes and ignores a virtually infinite amount of information received by the nervous system. Perception does so based upon an innate predisposition to filter, sort, organize and ignore information in a certain way and on a shared belief system. During the process of perception, the mind is both active and creative, imposing and creating order based partly upon a collective consciousness and partly upon an innate grammar.*

Talk. In order to be an effective talker, one has to be both talker and listener. [Just as, to be a good reader, one has to be both writer and reader.] The mind has to be active and creative in the act of reading and talking. Too many people talk the same way they listen (or read): passively—relying on preconception, stereotype, bias, prejudice. The thing is...a closed mind will lead to a closed mouth—even if that closed mouth is capable of making a loud noise.

In the film, the first suspect does manage to say one thing. From his perspective, managing to say that one thing was the equivalent of King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans defending the pass against ten thousand Persians. He tells the father: "They (the two little girls) were laughing when I left them." The dad immediately assumes the statement was a confession (and a taunt). It was mostly that "confession" which the father felt justified his actions in torturing the suspect for days. As it turns out, the statement was really the most straightforward truth the suspect could utter given his condition. The girls were fine when they left him—but he was incapable of

adding that the woman who had kidnapped and imprisoned him for twenty years had taken them. He did the best he could to point the father in the right direction and what he said was absolutely true. It should have been simple to understand. The girls were fine and free when they left him: go look somewhere else for the kidnapper. Instead, the father's warped perspective, his inability to begin communication with trust, compelled him to turn a simple statement inside out.

The two suspects could have saved themselves and the kidnapped children if they had been able to talk. The parents of the other kidnapped child were rendered mute in the face of the father's brutality. They did not tell the police he had kidnapped and was torturing one of the suspects. The mother of one of the kidnapped children became a mute prisoner as a result of prescription medication. The father's only real act of communication in the film was a barely audible whistle for help.

There were a lot of prisoners in the film. There were a lot of people who could not talk. Are we prisoners because we can not talk or do we not talk because we are prisoners? In the classic prisoner's dilemma, the first prisoner to act selfishly survives but at the cost of the other prisoner's life. If the two prisoners could have talked to each other (impossible under the terms of the dilemma), they could have cooperated and both could have survived. Are we increasingly living out the prisoner's dilemma because we fail to trust each other enough to talk?

“We are just prisoners here, of our own device.”

Open your hearts and minds.