

Illiteracy – what to do

Yesterday I had cause to speak with one of our allotment holders. He wanted to finish his tenancy. I said that he would have to put it in writing. Eventually he admitted that he was 'not very good' with writing.

This morning, I received a text message from a lady for whom I had given a quote " **Sorry for delay boys getting the working around no3 son price is rather to high for mr but thanks you for your Text &time.**"

Those of us who are illiterate and were fortunate enough to have good education maybe take this for granted but I have known people who disguise their illiteracy by asking someone to for example read the label on some item of food because they've 'lost their glasses'.

In the USA one in six adults under 65 have low literacy – reading skills that are below those of fourth graders. Most of the 35 million affected were born in the US. In the United Kingdom we have a literacy rate of over 99% among residents aged 15 or older. In South Africa, the literacy rate is 94%. All of the European countries are near 100%. Bottom of the list are Niger at 15% and Guinea at 25%

Since learning these facts I have become very much more aware of the possibility that maybe people are shy of writing or having difficulty expressing themselves verbally. I am dubious about some people's self-definition learning ability. Perhaps they have not discovered the thing that really interests them. What I find difficult to do or should I say what I must pay more attention to is to speak in a straightforward way to make sure that the maximum number of people can understand. I don't want to sound patronizing though. I myself do not like being spoken at, I prefer to be spoken to.

One of the things that annoys me is when you speak to someone

out of the blue. They always say "pardon". I sometimes get irritated, in fact, most of the time get irritated, because I speak perfectly clearly and I know they heard me what I do sometimes is to pause, then they seem to process the information, and then answer my question. Maybe they were thinking of something else, fair enough. Sometimes, the hesitation is because people were not expected to be spoken to. When I go around in public, I try to be as open as possible to everybody and you will be surprised how many chances you get to speak, even if it's only to raise the famous subject of the weather.

Talking of which, this is a pretty lousy day with wind and rain. Yesterday we did two gardening jobs which although not exciting pays the rent. At the end of the second job, a lady from next door interrupted us. She obviously had difficulty in speaking because she rubbed her face. She told us that she was suffering from depression and pointed to 2 or 3 plastic bags that were near her back door and causing her upset. Our car was full enough but I decided to make space and get rid of as much as I could. She was thankful, and thanked us time and time again.

We have to remember that some people go from day to day without talking to anybody which would personally drive me nuts.