

The Ebonic Plague

I've taken my time in considering the issue of Ebonics – a.k.a. Black American English – recently adopted by the Oakland County School Board in California.

Having studied and taken more than a passing interest in linguistics in the past, I've found the debate on the topic interesting – and appalling.

The view from here is that, in adopting Ebonics as policy, the Oakland School Board has only served to sanction bad grammar.

More than once I have seen or read where some African-American professor posits that Ebonics is a blend of English and African words, once used by slaves to fool their masters. Fine. Where are the African words?

I've heard other academics debate the issue, saying that Black American English is genetic. Really? I am of Scottish-Irish ancestry. I

don't go around saying, "youse" and "bollix" and "bloody 'ell," nor do I break into a chorus of *Auld Lang Syne* on New Year's Eve.

Hell, I don't even like whiskey.

Let's face it, Ebonics is about bad grammar and lazy English.

To accept Ebonics as a viable alternative to English is to accept any regional dialect as proper. Suddenly, anyone from Newfoundland could claim, with some justification, that Newfoundland English is just as acceptable. Do we call that Newfonics?

In linguistics there are two schools of thought: prescriptive and descriptive.

Prescriptive means that, to remain viable, language and the rules which govern it, must be respected, lest it should fall into a chaotic state. The worst case scenario being that you could quite easily have two people speaking different dialects of the same language with neither understanding the other.

On the other hand, descriptivists will tell you that anything goes; as long as the message gets across, language has served it's only purpose – to communicate. Using the example in the last paragraph, this is where the whole thing falls apart – if two people speaking the same language cannot understand one another, then the descriptivist message is lost.

On a far more superficial level, I think it just sounds bad. An ex-girlfriend of mine, despite the fact that English was her first and only tongue, had an unerring ability to brutalize the language.

Being a prescriptivist at heart, I would grind my teeth every time I heard her say, "I seen it," or "Him and me, we seen him."

The sad thing is, this young woman had the benefit of a private school education and was attending university at the time. It isn't that she didn't know better, but that she didn't seem to care.

My question to her and those who choose to ignore the rules of grammar is thus: how do you expect people to take you seriously when basic good grammar seems beyond your grasp? If you cannot find it within yourself to observe even the most basic rules which are expected in civilized society, what makes you think that society should address you with the civility you think you deserve?

As with anything, the choice to speak poorly is yours. However, society has the right not to take you seriously.

If you don't expect much from people, don't be surprised when you don't get much.

As celebrated Black American filmmaker Spike Lee was recently quoted as saying, "Ebonics be stupid."

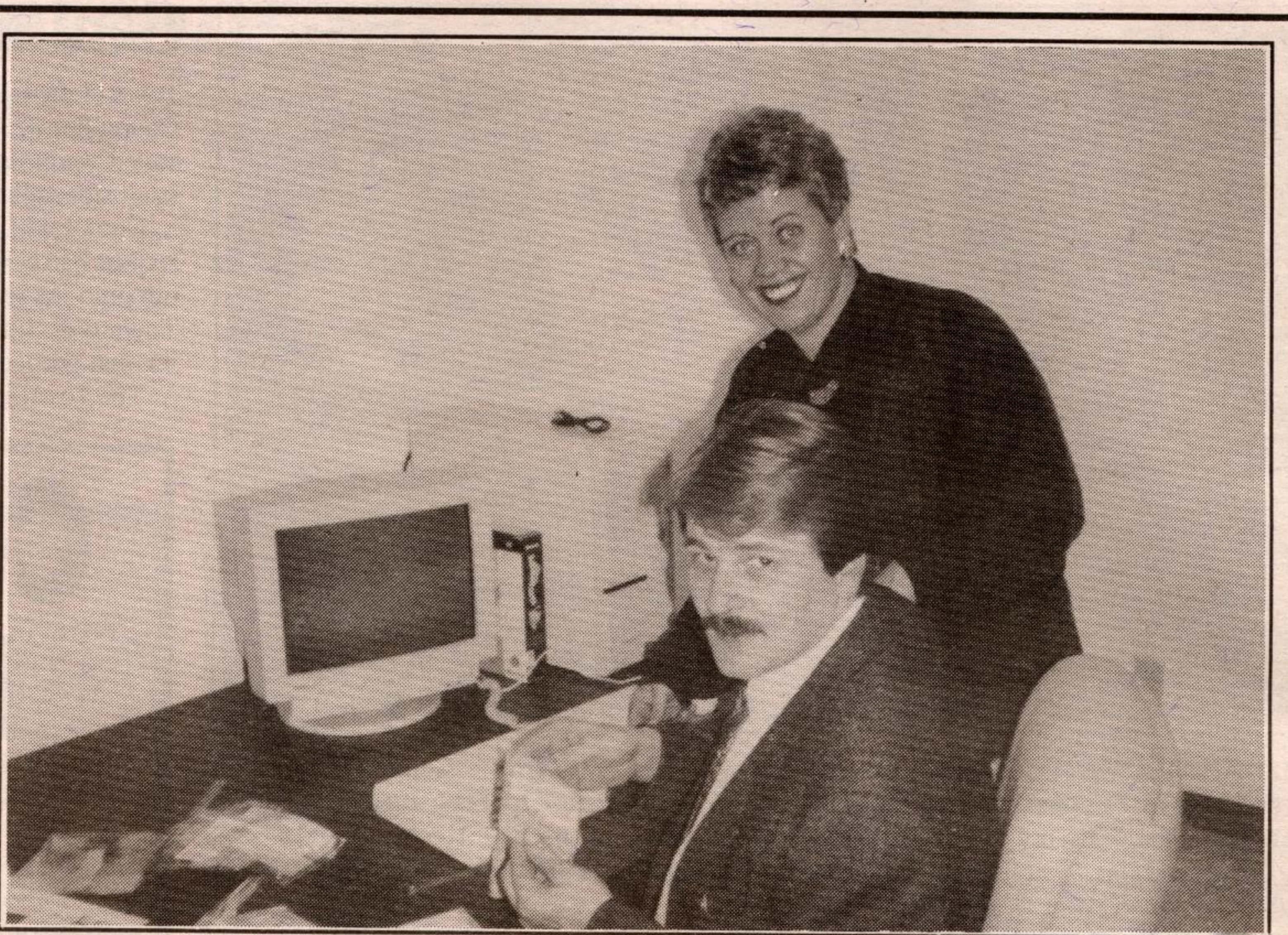
My question is, did Lee mean *stupid* as in dumb, or *stupid* as in good?

Point taken?

If it is the former, I be down wit dat! 'Ight, sucker MC?

The View From Here

With
Jamie Harrison



BITS & BYTES: Amy Murdy of Rock Products Limited waits as Ray Morier of Data General sets up the computer Rock Products won at a recent Georgetown Jr. A Raiders auction. The auction raised money for the hockey team. (photo submitted)

Your LETTERS

Tolerance found in hearts

To the Editor,
This letter is not about flyers, the fine people who live and teach in the Glen, or dance crazes!

However, I, too, am concerned about the future of Christmas concerts in our schools. My sister-in-law, who works in the B.C. school system, tells me that Christmas is now called a "Winter Festival" there, as reference to Christmas is forbidden. At my child's school, a child wanting to sing *O Holy Night* was forbidden to do so due to religious content. Last year, words to a song

were changed since the words "Today in the Town of David, a Saviour has been born" were offensive.

I am all for representing various cultures. I worked very hard on a concert this year entitled "Christmas Around the World" with our choir, the Georgetown Children's Chorus. I also recently adopted a son from Romania. I enjoy all cultures and love to hear their music anywhere, anytime, including Christmas. I do, however, feel upset that my own culture has, in effect, been banned.

Between now and next year's "Winter Festival," I hope to have clarified what guidelines schools have been given on this subject. I hope many other parents do the same. May tolerance of all religions and cultures, including Christianity, be found in our hearts and in our actions.

Lois Fraser,
Eighth Line

Singing Town's praises

To the Editor,
After living here for a couple of months, having moved from Greater Metro, I just had to vocalize my impressions of Georgetown. The living style and attitudes here are almost overwhelmingly refreshing.

The Women Are Prettier In Georgetown (song)

We moved our family to Georgetown

Searching for a better way of life
Escaped the tension of the big city

Left behind the bustle and the strife

We found an easy style in Georgetown

Where easy living people come and go

Even when they rush about in Georgetown

They definitely rush a little slow (Chorus)

All the people are friendlier in Georgetown

And all the children wear a smile

The gentlemen nod, hello, in Georgetown

And most folks go that extra mile
Now you'll find all you need in Georgetown

Good service in restaurants and shops

Delivered with a smile and goodwill

To help you they pull out all the stops

Now human kindness flows in Georgetown

As fresh as the countryside around

Helpfulness gushes like the fountain

That's missing in all these other towns.

(Chorus)

And, all the women are prettier in Georgetown

And all the children wear a smile

The gentlemen nod, hello, in Georgetown

And most folks go that extra mile

© 1996 (used by permission)
C. Cornelius Harnett
Hamilton Crescent

THE GEMINI

Publisher & Editor
Paul Nolan

Office Manager
Linda Hayes

Editorial Staff
Jamie Harrison
Frances Niblock
Terry Rouse
Joanne Stevenson

Advertising Staff
Mimi Burdett
Lynne Buscher
Trish Henry

Production Staff
Anne Klassen
Kim Konarzycki

Distribution Manager
Marie Shadbolt

Regular Contributors
Bill Ellis
Mike O'Leary
Alex Tough

Darkroom
Steve Martin

THE GEORGETOWN GEMINI is published weekly on Wednesdays by Wicklow Hills Publishing Co. Inc. Mailing address: P.O. Box 145, Georgetown, Ont., L7G 4T1. Phone: (905) 877-1113. Fax: (519) 853-5040. Georgetown administrative office: Personal Secretarial Services, Unit 47, 360 Guelph St., L7G 4B5. Reproduction without permission is prohibited. Ideas expressed herein are those of the author only.

AD SALES: Publisher is responsible for errors in advertisements to extent of cost of that portion of the space occupied by erroneous item.

PHONE THE GEM:
(905)877-1113

FAX THE GEM:
(519)853-5040