

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss

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Them

Last month I wrote about how *they* is being used as a singular pronoun. As I opened up a copy of last month's newsletter to write this one, the word *they* was staring at me and the word *them* popped into my head.

They, their, them are three forms of the same word – They are going to the movie. They're paying their own way. Would you like to go with them?

When I hear the word *them*, it is different to me than the others. One of the reasons is what my mind thinks is the opposite of the word *them*.

When I think of the words *he, she* and *they*, the opposite is *I* - he will bring the ball or I will. The opposite of *his, hers* and *theirs* is *mine* - her dog is bigger than mine. However, when I think of *them*, the opposite should be *me* – do you want to go with them or me? But it's not.

When the word *them* comes around, my immediate context is *us* - do you want to go with them or us?

So, what's the big deal? I could just as easily have said, they will bring the balls or we will.

I think it is because *he* and *she*, which are always singular, and *they* which can sometimes be singular, could just as easily be referring to someone within my group or to someone in a different group. *Them*, on the other hand, still feels plural to me and I can't imagine using the word *them* to refer to someone within my group.

So again, what's the big deal? I think it has to do with this automatic prejudice that we have, or at least I seem to have, that people inside my group are "better" than people outside of my group.

Better? Okay, how about better known, safer, more like me, more likely to return a favor, more likely to believe the way I do, or more likely to accept me.

What groups do I belong to? More than I could ever list – men, Caucasians, College graduates, workers, Christians, kids,

homeowners, engineers, car drivers, writers, iPhone owners, adults, fifty-something year olds, parents, Americans, cooks and diners.

Is being in any of these groups "better" than being in the other groups? No. Is feeling like my group is better than another group good? Probably not. Does separating my group from other groups cause problems? Very often.

So how do I get the *us vs. them* out of *them*? Good question and I wish I had a good answer. Maybe if I make an effort to use the word *them* in positive sentences – I want to be one of them – between them and us, we make a good team – If anyone wants to come over for dinner, tell them to give me a call.

Maybe it is realizing that the people in one of my groups are also not in my other groups – Nelson owns an Android phone, Jessica is a cool Canadian, and without readers, there wouldn't be much of a point in being a writer.

Doug

Thanks for taking another little jaunt into the guts of writing with me. I promise that next month it will be more newsy. Sign up for future newsletters at <http://www.douglasclarke.com/lists>