

To: BOUSD Board Members & Candidates; Dr. Brad Mason, Superintendent

From: Terry Sullivan

Subject: My Thoughts Regarding Last Week's Meeting at Fanning Elementary

Date: November 6, 2018

My parents moved to Sleepy Hollow from Winona, Minnesota, back in 1947 when I was 18 months old. We later moved to 222½ South Pomona Avenue, which is roughly where Buffalo Wild Wings is currently located. Our landlord was Sam Landa, he of the legendary Sam's Place. I've lived in Brea proper, with a few interludes in between, since late 1948. I attended Laurel Elementary, Brea Jr. High, and Brea-Olinda High, class of '63.

W. E. Fanning's grandsons, Dick and Bill, were in the classes of '62 and '64, respectfully. In addition, I took Biology I from their father, Karl Fanning, who was, as I'm sure you know, W. E. Fanning's son.

I attended last week's presentation/discussion at Fanning Elementary. It was truly fascinating to hear so many different perspectives on this occasionally heated topic. For some people, it's about racial injustices they themselves had experienced since early childhood. For some of the Fanning teachers, it was about being sick and tired from having to take so much flak from the public. Bill Fanning quite articulately refuted the allegations of his grandfather's membership in the KKK and the emotional impact those charges have had on his family. A number of long time, very influential Brea citizens spoke about how unfair it is to besmirch the character of a man they felt did so much for the city and who was such a fine man whom they had known personally. Others felt that the evidence against Mr. Fanning was so undeniable that it's imperative that the school's name must be changed.

My takeaway from this conversation was that it can be highly problematic, not to mention downright irresponsible, for people to see the past through the eyes of the present. It's a perfect example of the human comedy. We've witnessed this phenomenon in numerous instances over the past few years. The issue of taking down statues of famous Confederate generals, along with the assertion that Confederate flags must be removed from flagpoles, are two good examples of this. What are the odds that the people who adamantly advocate for taking these actions, had they actually lived during the 1860's, would have the same points of view as they express today? I'd say slim and none.

Something I'm sure we can all agree on that fuels this debate all the more so is the profound impact the internet has on our lives, both good and bad. All too often we see or hear about Tweets, Facebook, Pinterest or Instagram posts, etc., "going viral." Someone puts out a statement, be it accurate or not, into the electronic ether and, in turn, recipients begin to pile on without the slightest bit of research on the matter. I choose to call that type of behavior "electronic vigilantism." And, because of the efficiency of the delivery system, the internet, those charges can spread like a wildfire throughout the blogosphere in a matter of seconds. It's the 21st century's equivalent of playing the telephone game, where a group of people are seated in a circle and someone whispers a story into another person's ear and so on and so on until the last person is then asked to tell the story the way they heard it expressed. It can be wildly amusing to hear what the original person said versus what the last person said.

Let's, for the sake of argument, say that the allegations of Mr. Fanning's KKK membership are true. Does anyone really think that here in Orange County he and his fellow local Klansmen actually wore white hoods and robes, burned crosses, and tied up and burned black people on a cross? In reality, local KKK's were much more likely to be involved in redlining and/or other more subtle forms of racial profiling by preventing blacks from being in town past sunset. From all I've read and discussed regarding this matter, that's the manner in which W. E. Fanning, a man of his time, was more likely to be a participant.

I grew up around redlining here in Brea and didn't so much as give it a second thought. We had one Japanese girl and a handful of Mexicans at Brea-Olinda while I was in school there. That's it and nothing more. I went to a Brea-Olinda boys' basketball game back in 1985, some 22 years after I graduated, and saw that Brea's point guard was actually black. I was downright astonished, but I was also most pleased to see it.

Hypothetically, if I were to send out a Tweet stating matter-of-factly that Brea's Mayor Glenn Parker is a serial killer, how long would it take before electronic vigilantes would have him put in jail for life without so much as a trial? It seems to me that these days an allegation such as that is all too often given more credibility than it actually deserves.

There are no easy answers to this conundrum. My heart goes out to all of you. No matter what your ultimate decision is, some people are bound to disagree with you, sometimes heatedly. I can only say that I wish you all the best during this challenging period.

Respectfully,

Terry Sullivan