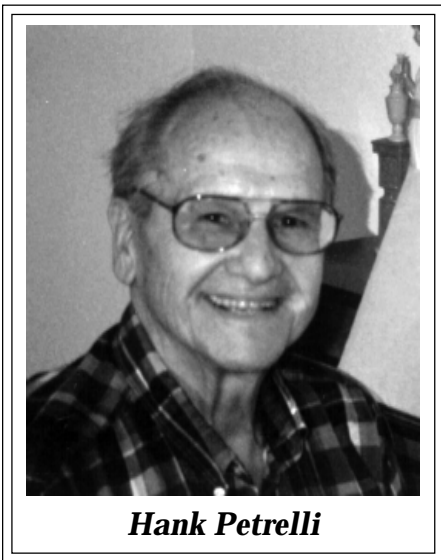




The Lillian Way™

by Henry Petrilli
Springfield, Illinois



Hank Petrilli

Dedicated in memory with much love, respect, and appreciation for my "big sister" Lillian, from whom I learned much about the indignities suffered by blacks in our society. Sometimes these were done with malice, sometimes out of ignorance, and other times because it was "the way things were."

I was a young 19-year-old male who shared his first office job with Lillian, who truly became like a big sister, since I had only brothers. She was about ten years older than I was, and was the first black person I really got to know. We worked very closely for about three years until I moved on to another job. However, we maintained our friendship until the time she passed.

Please understand that "black" instead of African American is used throughout this pamphlet and is not meant to be disrespectful. It was an issue Lillian and I discussed. She would laugh and say, "I don't know if I am Negro, colored, black or African American." We used "black" as our term of preference, and out of respect for Lillian, I choose to use that word.

The Lillian Way

The Lillian Way provides new channels of communication for people of different ethnic or racial backgrounds. It introduces people to each other in a non-threatening way in the comfort of people's homes. Through conversation, it erases some

of the racial and ethnic tensions and misunderstandings that are still so prevalent in our society today.

Objective of the Lillian Way

The Lillian Way has one objective. Only one. The Lillian Way's only objective is for people of different races to get to know one another in a personal way, to share experiences and perceptions, and in a very gentle way, develop a better understanding and appreciation of what each person can "bring to the table" in our society. The Lillian Way makes use of a very simple format: face-to-face conversations in very small groups in the comfort of people's homes, in an environment that welcomes and demands active listening so that people can share their life experiences, and in doing so, learn from each other.

Why have the "Lillian Way"?

We have all felt discriminated against by somebody or circumstances at some time. Whether this happened at school, at work, at play or someplace in the community, and whether it was due to lack of money, position,

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athletic ability, social status, gender, race, age, or other factors, we have all felt the pangs of discrimination of being singled out unfairly. Perhaps we have done the same to others, knowingly or unknowingly.

The only requirement for participation in a Lillian Way gathering is a genuine interest in getting better acquainted with people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. The Lillian Way provides opportunities for open, honest conversation, with high regard for better relationships and less regard for being "politically correct." For example, we might say this is an opportunity for whites and blacks to get to know one another better. But we might begin to tread too lightly from the beginning - not sure, for example, whether some people prefer the term "African American" or "black" or "people of color," and not sure how to label people whose parents have a mixed heritage. Let's get past that one very quickly and come to a Lillian Way meeting with an open mind. Labeling is not the issue. Dialogue is. Conversation is. Honesty is. Better understanding is.

There is a crying need for people to learn from each other and educate each other and dispel the myths that exist among us. I was shocked to hear someone say recently, "We don't have any black friends." The same could be said, I'm sure, among black people if

they substitute the word white for black.

To white people, I ask: When was the last time you visited in the home of a black person? To black people, I ask: When was the last time you visited in the home of a white person? In Lillian Way conversations, it will become abundantly clear that misconceptions exist among people of different races. The Lillian Way is a chance for a different approach to enable people to talk to one another about subjects that otherwise might never enter into our conversations without some embarrassment.

We all carry some baggage handed down from our own heritage. The Lillian Way gently allows others and us to identify this baggage more clearly, and then to act differently because we are more enlightened and more informed by people in our own community.

A bit of history - and what the Lillian Way is NOT

The fact that racial and ethnic tensions exist is not a new revelation on my part. Far from it. It is a great social problem, and has been historically. It was a great social problem in the 1800s, when slavery still existed. It was a great social problem from the Civil War until the 1940s and 1950s, with legal segregation, Jim Crow laws, and lynchings. How horrid! In the 1950s and 1960s, protesters rose up and a series of civil rights laws

were passed. But the laws did not erase some prejudicial personal attitudes and "informal segregation" in most American communities the last half of the 20th century.

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson issued an executive order that created the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. He named Illinois Governor Otto Kerner chairman and New York City Mayor John Lindsey vice chairman. Called the Kerner Commission, it published an impressive report that dealt primarily with ways that federal, state and municipal governments should address the underlying problems that led to the commission's creation. Since then, governments at all levels have enacted much legislation and many programs to address social problems related to racial issues. Many well-designed programs exist to promote harmony and understanding. However, many rely on laws, government intervention or the formal organization by an established group. And many have objectives with specific outcomes in mind, such as improved economic opportunities for minorities.

Government and organizations' programs at the federal, state and local levels, it must be said, are designed largely to resolve institutional problems or provide better social or economic opportunities for individuals.

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The Lillian Way leaves it to others to make judgments on these programs. Why? It is critical to emphasize that the Lillian Way does not seek to change laws, implement public policy programs at any level, organize a protest or demonstration, organize a petition process for any social action, sell any particular political party or point of view, or provide economic assistance or jobs to people in need. It does not endorse candidates, groups, programs, affirmative action efforts, or legislation.

The Lillian Way has another objective, and it recognizes one important fact: Only individuals can improve personal relationship problems.

A word about terms and definitions

The Lillian Way accepts and recognizes that different people use different terms to describe or identify people of certain races or ethnic backgrounds.

As recently as the presidential terms of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in the 1960s, the term "Negro" was the most acceptable word for identifying certain people. Before that, in the 1950s, the most frequently used acceptable term was "colored people."

At the same time, Americans in casual conversation also commonly used derogatory nicknames for people of Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, German, Chinese, African and other origins. For better or for worse, it was

an accepted practice in most neighborhoods and communities. Socially, that has changed for the better.

The Lillian Way condemns the use of derogatory nicknames, but recognizes that "Negro" was replaced by "black" for almost three decades (1970s-1990s) and now the terms "African American" and "people of color" are being used more frequently. Which, if any, is the "right" term? It depends on who you ask! The Lillian Way respects and accepts all of the respectful terms and does not want to get involved with differences of opinion about labeling, even though the language we use is critically important. Until society conclusively decides on the most acceptable words, we respectfully suggest that people be identified and "labeled" with whatever terms or words are most acceptable to them.

Establishment of the Lillian Way

The Lillian Way was created in the summer of 2000 by Henry Petrilli of Springfield, Illinois, after he had given much thought to the issue and decided the time was still right to bring people together to talk about racial issues and racial tensions.

For more information:

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**Summary
The Lillian Way**

1. A host initiates a meeting and invites a person of another race to co-host a meeting.
2. The hosts/hostesses invite other men and women to a meeting, with a goal of having a gathering of five blacks and five whites, ideally with an equal representation of men and women.
3. The participants discuss experiences from their own lives that they believe had racial overtones. Listening skills and respect for one another's perceptions, feelings and experiences are of utmost importance.
4. The participants conclude by discussing what they have learned from the experience.
5. Participants may decide to spread "The Lillian Way" by hosting additional meetings with additional couples of different races.
6. Anyone may contact the Lillian Way for additional copies of the Lillian Way's guidelines.