

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Sarcasm is the current social disease

“HOW late do you serve lunch?” Miranda asked the waiter at Reposado.

“Do I look like a waiter?” the young man retorted angrily. He held up his Palantir badge.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Miranda. “I thought you were a waiter.”

“So does that mean that you’re an old maid?” the young man snapped, and stormed out of the restaurant.

“Wow,” said Valerie. “When did our lives get so overtaken by sarcasm?”

“About 30 years ago,” said Miranda. “It’s the current social disease. People are afraid.”

“Afraid of what?” asked Valerie.

“We are all afraid that we are not good enough,” said Miranda. “And

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when you’re filled with fear, sarcasm is a way to elevate your personal status, by putting down the person.”

That week Miranda had attended an orientation at Palo Alto High School for volunteers interested in tutoring students.

During the session, one teacher had said, “In your interactions with our students, please do not use sarcasm. Although sarcasm is widespread in our culture right now, it is not a good way to treat children.”

The statement struck a cord with Miranda.

The teacher reiterated, “Sarcasm is

a weapon that will alienate children. So please do not use it.”

Miranda appreciated his insight.

“Education is about learning and trusting and developing relationships,” the teacher continued, “And none of that is facilitated by the use of sarcasm.”

When she was younger, Miranda reflected, sarcasm did not seem prominent in the culture the way it was now.

People were more authentic, then, when they spoke, and less ironic, she felt. Maybe people disagreed, but it wasn’t by making fun of each other. Now sarcasm was everywhere.

“It’s from television,” said Valerie. “As the ironic television sitcom has taken over the American brain, so sarcasm has taken over the American psyche.”

“All we are doing when we are sar-

castic,” Miranda said, “Is telling other people that they are wrong.”

“And why do we need to tell other people they are wrong?” Valerie asked.

“Because,” said Miranda, “We feel that deep down there is something not right with us. So shoving that discontent onto another person is a way to deny our own low self-image.”

“So sarcasm is a marker of self-loathing?” asked Valerie.

“I think so,” said Miranda.

But now Miranda realized that she was beginning a rant. That was a warning sign. When she was on a rant, it was time for her to go to an ACA meeting — Adult Children of Alcoholics — where she could look at what was really underneath her discontent.

More tomorrow.