

3/25/1998

A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

There is a revolution going on and I want you in on it! Ten years ago on Line Avenue and East 79th Street a night of rioting broke into the headlines and newscasts all over America. I remember watching the news in my West Texas pastorate and sitting bolt upright when the anchorman on national television began to tell about the “troubled city of Shreveport, Louisiana.” I grieved deeply for this city and the wounded people who endured that trauma on every side. “The Cedar Grove Riot” now had a place in history. But worse, it has been seared into the corporate psyche of a community.

It was only this week that I found out where the riot started and then boiled over. I found out because I was standing on the site of the house which we are constructing for Yul Taylor and his family to move into as Shreveport Community Renewal’s Internal Care Unit (ICU) Youth Leader for Cedar Grove.

In what is to be the front yard of that house, I was talking with a life long resident of Cedar Grove, who is now a full time Neighborhood Ambassador for SCR. Sampson Cawthorn pointed to the southeast and said, “Mack, just right there was the place where the riot started.” Yul’s house is on East 78th Street, one half block from the explosion of frustration that night ten years ago. I was stunned.

The significance of what we are being led to do is not fully visible to any of us, because “now we see in a mirror dimly.” I knew that Yul and his family and Carolyn Abner and her family were moving into the highest crime area of our city. I also knew that the area was called “Cocaine Alley,” by residents and police alike because of the daily traffic in drugs. I knew that God was calling all of us to penetrate the darkness of hatred and hopelessness by showing the commitment of “coming to stay.” But, I had not known that we were sending our folks in to live within a stone’s throw of where the rocks flew that tragic and bloody night. Now consider that: they are going there to live and to work in the streets and to love the people!

I want to tell you that a true revolution is going on. It is quiet, but it is real. Let me tell you what I know about it. First the big picture. Ten years ago, the Bishop of the Diocese of Shreveport for the Roman Catholic Church, William B. Friend, determined to mobilize his congregations in an all out effort to arrest the disintegration of that one area known as Cedar Grove. As most of us know the local parish in Cedar Grove is St. Catherine of Sienna. It was wasting away, now it is one of the most vibrant congregations in the city under the dynamic leadership of Father Bill Spencer. They have converted the school into a community center, hired full time staff under the leadership of Robert Alford, and have begun to mobilize the neighborhood in fantastic ways. In 1993, Bishop Friend, who helped start Shreveport Community Renewal as the first Board Member and with a grant of ten thousand dollars, invited me to join with him in the intentional investment of our lives in the Cedar Grove neighborhood.

I said, “We will come to Cedar Grove.”

Now let me give you some specifics in what we have been led to do and I will leave it to you to draw the significance of events from those facts.

- Two families have committed their lives to live and work in the Cedar Grove neighborhood. This is an area which had 1,926 crimes in 1997, the highest in the city. It is a neighborhood where 60% of the families have an income of under \$15,000 annually. It is a place where 56% of the adults do not have a high school diploma. And 54% of the families live in poverty. I asked Gwen Taylor, Yul's lovely wife, (a former homecoming queen of Byrd High School!.) if she and her three beautiful daughters were afraid and she answered me a year ago and said, "Yes, we are afraid, but we believe that if we are true to God's call to love, then the day will come in Shreveport, that when someone says the name 'Cedar Grove,' then no one will shudder." Fact: Two families moving in to stay.
- We are building two 2100 square foot houses for our families. Each will have a large front room in which to hold children's and youth meeting. Broadmoor Baptist Church is providing the funds for one and The Community Foundation of Shreveport/Bossier is paying for the cost of material for the second. Volunteers from all over the city are helping out. Fact: The house on East 78th Street is up and has a roof and walls!
- Jack Loftus our building supervisor has reported an astonishing occurrence. *In an area which has the highest crime rate in the city, not one stick of lumber, not one item of construction, not one tool has been stolen!* The neighbors, even the Rolling Sixties Crips are protecting the building site!! Jack reports literally hundreds come by daily to see the house going up. It is the first new construction in Cedar Grove in over 40 years!! Fact: Even the physical presence of the house is bringing hope!
- Sampson Cawthorn, our Neighborhood Ambassador is making calls daily and visiting with his neighbors from house to house bringing the message of hope to folks that had begun to despair. I wish each of you could hear his weekly reports as he goes through his report sheet and tells of the laughing, shouting, and crying that is happening in the living rooms of the people of Cedar Grove.
Fact: I have never been so amazed in all my life!!
- When Yul's house is complete within the next month, we are going to have a parade! We are going to get bands, and organize the youth and children and the neighbors and we will march from A.B. Palmer Park to the house to dedicate and to bless it. Then everyone will eat themselves sick on the best BarBQue in Shreveport. Fact: This calls for a celebration!
- Finally, the owner of two of the busiest crack houses in Cedar Grove has gotten word to me, that he wants to sell them and move out. His traffic has been devastated by the presence of The ICU Friendship House only two doors away!! Fact: We are shutting down "Cocaine Alley" and Yul has not even moved into the house yet!

Yes, there is so much more. The forty youth we are taking to America's premier Christian Sports Camp this July, the children's playground we will build, the 100 houses we will renovate and paint in the Cedar Grove neighborhood, the beach volleyball courts we will build, and all of the love that we can give, tell me that there is a quiet revolution going on and I want you in on it!! Come and join the Mission Team of SCR and let's take this city back!!