

7/9/2007

A WORD from Mack

## YOU CAN GO BACK HOME AGAIN!

About twice a week I walk down the street where I was born and where I grew up and lived until I married at the ripe old age of twenty-two! It wasn't a rich neighborhood but it was a great street. We were all wealthy beyond our dreams. And each time that I walk down my old street and pass the corner house on the south side at 271 East Fairview, a flood of memories rushes through my mind and suddenly I am home again.

It is summer and we are busy building tree houses, digging forts, and having dirt clod battles with other streets to see who can claim Querbes Park. No doors were locked. Evenings saw all the neighbors sitting on the porch after supper where the front yards were transformed into our dens and we played group games until we couldn't make each other out even with the porch lights on. I remember when our street was paved and we got sidewalks. Now there were bicycle races and chases galore. And every summer we put on a group talent show and charged a dollar to our parent to watch all of us in turn sing, dance, recite poems, and generally just cut up.

It was so typical. All the moms watched all the kids on the street and, of course, had spanking privileges with every child! Who ever heard of a home burglar alarm in the late 1940's and 1950's when I grew up on East Fairview? I walk down that street today and I can tell you where everyone lived. I think of all the kids and wonder where the East Fairview urban Diaspora has taken us.

It was all so typical. And that is precisely the point. Because it no longer is. As Dr. Paul Scherer has so incisively observed, "We have improved ourselves emptier and emptier." Our world has changed. The streets we grew up on have been transformed into a twenty first century model of "neighborhood lite." Very little interaction with our neighbors is the hallmark of today. We can e-mail friends all over the world but we rarely know who is living and perhaps dying only five houses down the block. We have become gradually disconnected from our neighbors while becoming "virtually" connected world wide.

And this disconnection with our next door neighbors, our street village, is symptomatic of societal disintegration. Lewis Mumford, in his 1956 book, The Transformations of Man, went to the core when he said, "The greatest enigma of human history is, 'Why do we keep collapsing the societies we construct?'"

So I walk down my street twice a week to remind me that we must return to the basics. My memories reinforce my calling. I have learned that caring alone

cannot stop the collapse of community but caring together can. I have learned that only by connecting and reconnecting caring people can we reweave the fundamental fabric of human society so necessary for our children and their children to thrive. And walking down my old street redirects me to a single minded mission in the midst of what appears to be such a complex and plural world where busyness is ever distracting from life.

How do we put it all back together? I remember that the great man of letters, and toast of all of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England, Dr. Samuel Johnson, was told as a boy by his uncle, “Most great minds make the mistake of studying the intricacies of the leaves and the limbs of the tree. But you must learn to grasp the trunk. Then you can shake all of the limbs and the leaves at once!” So the answer in rebuilding and restoring the neighborhoods that can nurture and nourish quality living is to invest ourselves in a simple, systematic, and intentional process of connecting caring people where they live. This model can then be replicated over and over until a city is leavened. That city then becomes a model for other cities until a nation is leavened.

It takes a dedicated group of people to be full time community nurturers. They must learn how to motivate and mobilize and train others while nourishing the relationships of friendships that are forming and teaching them to become nurturers themselves. Now we will have thousands who will walk down their old streets and remember and respond to the call of those memories. T.S. Eliot said, “It is a long journey that ends in upon itself.” And that is true. If you go back to memory lane, you can glimpse a new future when you commit yourself to be the neighbor again.

This is our mission here. We call it community renewal. And our one sentence synopsis is also our bugle call, “Shreveport-Bossier Community Renewal has developed a model which concretely initiates, systematically generates, and methodically sustains safe and caring human community with real, and measurable, and remarkable results!” Together we *can* go back home. Together we *must!*