

It Takes a Village

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It's the sixth month of the year already, the month with the longest daylight hours in the Northern Hemisphere. June is a time of roses, weddings and gardens, crab derbies and the grand opening of numerous Farmers Markets along the coast. From now on, my house will be filled with bouquets of flowers. It's also a time of endings and beginnings for students and perhaps this year, more than most, a time when commencement speakers struggle to find hopeful messages for our young people. I think almost everyone wants to be a productive member of society, but the path is often filled with boulders, gullies and detours. Perhaps one long-lasting message to impart is that over a lifetime, sadness will be balanced by happiness. Gibran was right when he said sadness is a wall between two gardens.

Our world is full of uncertainty. Daily, we're assaulted on every side--wars, natural disasters, unending political battles, a struggling economy and the moral decay of our country. In times like these, everyone seems irritable and nervous. People are weary and anxious as to what will happen next. Every day, another bitter arrow of the world pierces our hearts.

Makes me contemplate our kindly small towns here on the edge of the continent, our own net of life that supports us and keeps us afloat. We have most of the troubles found everywhere; yet, we're different. Life seems safer here because it's shared. What makes us unique? What builds community? Volunteers come to mind. People work hard here to create new visions of community. Volunteers make the world go round, especially in small towns. Volunteers keep parks and church grounds beautiful. It's volunteers who give freely of their time

and efforts to serve on boards and committees, who drive the Dial-a-Ride van, donate plants and books and set up community sales. We take comfort in knowing we have each other's books on our shelves and plants in our yards. It's volunteers who form neighborhood watch programs, man phone trees, learn first aid and attend emergency preparedness classes. Neighbors volunteer to watch our houses when we're gone, feed our pets, and call if something is amiss. Moms in classrooms assist to keep the children safe, read to and befriended; volunteers give their time to Alder Creek and Cartm and the Hope Chest.

Through these efforts of giving and small kindnesses, we fulfill one of the most basic needs we all hunger for—connection. We connect at the Manzanita Writers Series when the open mic allows for people to share their stories. We connect with members of our community whenever we roll up our sleeves and prepare a meal for someone in need, carry their groceries to the car or stack their wood. We connect when we give someone a ride to the clinic or take them home from church. We connect at the pool, which is more than a place to swim. It's a place where we care for one another.

Work builds community. It gives us a reason to exist that is larger than ourselves. When we work for others, we do so, not just for our own good alone but for our community as well. It's our gift to the future. The dignity and importance of meaningful work is a gift that nourishes community. Perhaps our greatest fear is of being good for nothing, so we strive for meaningful work. And if we become hopeless and despairing as some of us have lately, it's good to remember the power we have to make a difference in the lives of others, young and old, and to remember that in the process, we build community. And to hold before us the wise words of anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world." "Indeed," she says, "it is the only thing that ever has."