University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Extension

1-1-2001

NF01-479 Creating a Strong Family: Commitment to the Community

John Defrain
University of Nebraska--Lincoln, jdefrain1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist

Part of the Agriculture Commons, and the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Defrain, John, "NF01-479 Creating a Strong Family: Commitment to the Community" (2001). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension.* Paper 312.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/312

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

NF01-479

NebFact

Published by Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Creating a Strong Family Commitment to the Community

By John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

Our long-time friend Nancy in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, e-mails to say that they're alive and well. Literally. The tornado didn't hit their part of the city, and Nick and the kids are fine. Nancy shares the news about friends, noting that everyone made it through the storm in one piece. "The newly-hired campus minister lost his home, but he and his family are OK." Eleven people died in the tornado, according to early reports.

"I have been proud of our community's response," Nancy adds. "Seems like 'the South' often gets bad publicity whenever anything happens. (How do they always manage to find someone in an undershirt with no front teeth to put on camera?) But the news also has reported how the community has pulled together in this emergency. The first night there were over 600 people in emergency shelters. The next night there were two.

"Everyone else has been taken in by family, friends and people from churches or housed by insurance. Our church has set up a special fund to receive contributions from all over to be diverted to the people who lost homes and such. And I think every other church in town has done the same. Many sent out work crews to help with cleanup. We appreciate your continued good thoughts and prayers."

Nancy's description of the Tuscaloosa tornado reminded me once again that strong families build strong communities, and strong communities, in turn, strengthen families in a continuous reciprocal process. The strong families in our research over the years have been committed to their own families and also demonstrated a commitment to the well-being of the greater community - the extended family, friends, neighbors, people at work, the greater good. Literally, in many cases, a commitment to the family of humankind.

This commitment is demonstrated through more formal efforts in religious organizations and social and family service agencies on local, state, national and international levels. And, this commitment is demonstrated countless more times every day by simple "neighborliness" in the steady stream of positive daily encounters human beings have with each other that make life happier for all involved.

Our friend, Busisiwe Nkosi, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, comes from South Africa. Busi, a member of the Zulu language group, has spent a good portion of her life living in small villages. For her doctoral dissertation, she is beginning what will become a worldwide study of a Zulu folk saying, *"Ukwakha utho ezeni."* This translates roughly to mean "something from nothing."

Busi believes that even in a small African village with few economic and material resources, people can still create a good life for themselves by sharing and caring. "Even though they may be very poor in a Western sense," she explains, "they are very rich because of their love and support for each other." Busi also has seen a good deal of the "something from nothing" principle in small-town America, and in her dissertation work she wants to compare an American rural community with a Zulu village in South Africa, a rural Aboriginal community in Australia and an Inuit village in Alaska.

She also will be visiting urban areas in her studies, looking closely for ways people in large cities create a village-like environment for themselves in spite of the speed and impersonality that comes with size.

"Violence thrives in the shadows." This is an old saying among professionals who work to prevent abusive behavior. Interviews and observations in families where abuse has occurred often give a picture of a nuclear family with few friends, an isolated and insular family with no outsiders looking in out of genuine concern, no one dropping by to help, no one caring how things are going in the family.

Conversely, many researchers have found how important a network of loved ones and friends can be to our well-being. Carolyn Attneave, a family therapist and psychologist, cited a University of Washington study that found individuals who had at least 15 people with whom they related in their social network survived and flourished on kidney dialysis. But, "those persons with the best physical prognosis in the world and who were apparently healthy specimens but did not have outside resources died within a year. They died despite the doctors saying, 'This is a good risk.'" Patients actually lived longer if they had lots of loved ones and friends.

By reaching out, we are giving each other, literally, the gift of life. Our morale increases, we learn new ways of managing difficulties in life from each other, we invest enjoyable time with each other, we enhance our personal feelings of self-esteem and confidence. There is a law of distributive justice at work as we demonstrate our commitment to each other in the community:

You always get back what you give, and if you really think about it, you probably get back a lot more.

File NF479 under: Family Life
F-32, Relationships
Issued June 2001

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Interim Dean and Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.