

A Sense of Belonging

What is it about a sense of belonging that makes us human beings feel safe, complete, good, appreciated, cared about and worthwhile? When human beings feel alone, isolated, different, or excluded we tend to feel like life is worthless and we feel hopeless about changing it. The old term - anomie – feeling separate, isolated, desperate, and hopelessly alone is what most people tend to shy away from. We want a sense of belonging, of being part of something bigger than us. Hence a long, long time ago human beings came up with the notion of families. Then the notion of communities grew from families banding together.

Families are supposed to share some basic values and beliefs. They are supposed to be a team working together to prepare children to be independent, able to function on their own, leave the mother-ship so to speak, and create their own. Great dreams. Great motives. Great goals. But sometimes they break down. Sometimes parents want their young ones to be so ready they push them relentlessly. Sometimes they want to make it so easy they give them everything and the children don't understand how to earn things on their own. The children develop a major sense of entitlement and wait for the next gift based solely on their ability to breath. Sometimes parents are so afraid the children will make the same mistakes they did that they're overly strict without giving their children room to make and learn from their own mistakes. Sometimes parents are so afraid of doing the wrong thing that they don't communicate their motives or explanations. "Do it because I said so," ends up feeling disrespectful to teens. But the biggest thing I think couples and families forget is that the basic unit – the parental unit, the couple unit, and

then the bigger family unit is supposed to be a team. And teams work together for common goals.

When a team is working well everyone on the team likes being on that team. When teams are not working well, and their goals are eluding them, they talk about what they could be doing better or differently. Individuals on the team try not to point the finger at someone else but look inside and decide how they can be a better team player. Somehow we sometimes forget about these basic strategies that work when we're trying to get a basic intimate family unit operating in a way where everyone feels good about coming home and seeing each other. Where kids don't avoid interacting with parents and parents don't feel daunted by their children. But re-connecting, re-establishing a team in our homes is possible.

This weekend two community organizations sponsored two events in Evergreen that were geared towards family and kids and bringing this community together so the community would feel like one big caring family. Cougar Pride held its Youth Festival at the Evergreen Lake House on Friday. From 4-7 PM there were fun events for elementary school kids. From 7:30 to 11:00 PM there was a music festival for sixth through twelfth graders. Three bands. Lots of kids. Few chaperones. And lots of energy. The kids who came had a good time. More kids came than could even be let into the Lake House at once. Sometimes when kids went out they couldn't get back in right away. It was a great turn-out. Saturday morning was the annual Kiwanis pancake breakfast at Evergreen High School. Again, a great turn out. A true Evergreen community event. Quieter than the night before. A much wider age group than the night before.

At both events I felt a sense of community. Of belonging. Of doing something good for our community – first helping to make a kids oriented event safe and available for teens and then helping in a large community fund raiser to benefit people in our own community who need extra help. Yesterday, during the afternoon, I was reading an old Canyon Courier and came across an article by the Helping Hands organization in Lakewood. They raise funds for people in need of one time help to get them over an unforeseen hump in their life. Their organization is pretty amazing, 100% of donations go to the people they have identified as being in need. You can know where your money is going, for a specific need, like a wheel chair, a month's rent for a single mother who has lost her job and is between jobs, medicine for a family without health insurance, etc. You can also give a donation to the organization for them to distribute as needed.

While we are all still feeling a sense of wanting to *do something*, perhaps we can do something that increases our sense of belonging in our community. Lakewood is close enough. Cougar Pride is closer, Kiwanis is right here too. (I want to mention other very worthy community organizations like Rotary, Habitat for Humanity, Mountain Resource Center, Christian Outreach, AAUW, etc.) It is amazing what getting involved will do for your spirits or what giving versus taking provides. In this time when everything feels rather tenuous, it feels good to reach out a little, share some apprehension, and know we want life to go on. We want to keep going. We want to be a part of something. We want a team approach to life where we have connections to other people despite differences. Cougar Pride is working hard to provide the 44 assets that have been identified as things kids need to feel worthwhile, appreciated, respected and therefore to have self-respect and make wise choices for their own well-being. When we turn to someone we meet,

acknowledge them, say a few kind words, let them know we too are in that human being category, and we're acknowledging their existence and importance, we're extending a sense of community on a personal level.

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