

## Love My Community

Community ~ I had always heard and used the word, but I'm not sure if I really understood the "soul" meaning of it. Moving was such a part of my life...sometimes as many as 13 times in 2 years. Some people would call it a transit life style, I just knew it as a my life. I lived in Pratt, Ks from about 1972 to 1974 ish – as a matter of fact, it was during those years that I acquired the nickname of Motorcycle Mary. Moved back to Pratt in 1981, raised my daughter, and then felt that "urge to move" again. Left my business of 20 years and went to Kansas City, Ks for a year. I'm just going to be straight up about that year. It was one of best/worst - soul searching/soul wrenching years of my life.

I was making great business contacts, I lived in a darling little apartment (and I emphasize little), Oak Park Mall within blocks - festivals and events going on all the time. Something was missing, but what?

I had gone from having a nail salon, where every hour on the hour my friends floated through and we cussed and discussed everyone and everything. My community of nail people, some of whom I had seen every two weeks for 20 years - I knew their kids names, the deaths, the divorces, the down times, the up times, etc. Heck, I even knew some of them better than their family members. And then one day, in all my splendor and glory, I was given the opportunity to go to KC to leave Pratt, and I did.

The first three months of anonymity was heaven – no one and I mean no one hollered "Hey Motorcycle Mary, how are ya?" I hadn't experienced that for many years. I would go to work in the morning, measure houses, go all over Kansas City, see some of the most beautiful homes I could ever imagine, and no one knew my name or wanted to stop and visit, it was all business talk and then they had to get to work. I would get home on a Friday evening, and except for rare exceptions, would be in that little apartment until Monday morning, without seeing anyone, and then off to work.

I began to look at it as a self imposed retreat, and it wasn't going well. I couldn't put my finger on the problem, yes, something was missing, but what the hell was it? And slowly it began to dawn on me – I missed my people – I missed my friends – I missed my community. I wanted to go home.

When my girl child was still in school, Shelia would spout off, "I want to move, let's go somewhere else." I always told her that one day she would appreciate living in one place for all of her school years. That she would have friends and acquaintances *for the rest* of her life. I didn't realize it then, but I was describing a community to her. I had never had that.

Sometimes people would say to me, "What a lifestyle you've had – you've done just about everything you set your mind to – you've got to see a lot of the country – I'm jealous." Well, I'm jealous of some of you who have lived in the same town and have known some of those town people ALL of your life. That's a rooted system of living. You can share memories of being in a canoe at Elm Mills with your friends and how one

got drenched and slapped up the side of her head with an oar by mistake (the one who had just gotten her hair done, of course) or the stories of the Miss Kansas Week and those wonderful after pageant parties and the elegant lady in her 70's who removed her 3 inch heels before off the diving board at the Dr.s house with all her pageant finery clothing on as the whole group chanted her on - or the two people who have been friends for years and one starts to tell a story and the other one can finish it...and you guys don't even have to tell the whole story...just a few words and laughter is enough to keep it going. If I'm going to tell you a story about my past, I have to fill in all the details and most of the time it turns into one of those "gosh, I guess you had to be there moments."

Ah, the grapevine of the small town life, where everyone knows a little bit about your business - your family life - your history. A little gossip here - a little tidbit there - yes, it's the grapevine of the community - but that same grapevine can carry good too. Jerry's dad died last night, Lela fell and injured her knees and won't be able to work for months, Francis is in the hospital - and these grapevine tongues spread the word and Katie bar the door...meals are brought in, visits are made, kids are picked up, that wheelchair ramp will appear, utilities are paid, and groceries show up on your front porch with only a doorbell ring.

Below is the technical term for community. I may not understand the word as you do, but I know the "soul" meaning of it now.

*Main Entry: com-mu-ni-ty      Pronunciation: \kə-'myü-nə-tē\      Function: noun*  
*Community - What is it? According to merriam-webster it is among other things 1: a unified body of individuals or an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location or a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society <a community of retired persons> e: a group linked by a common policy.*

Yes, I missed my community, my people, my roots, my Pratt. Look around at all your friends in your community - ya know, the ones who really know your name...the check out girl at the grocery store, the barber, the beautician, the waitress, and the people whom you come into contact with everyday. Some of them joke with you, some of them just call you by name when you come in the door, but they do know you. There's a feel about living in a small town and I like to call it comfortable. After all those hectic, out of control years I lived through, I like calm, peace, and being comfortable. I love sitting on my front porch and waving at the cars going by, watching people walk by, strollers full of children, dogs on leashes. And in this little town, about the only "drive by thing" we experience is someone mooning us, while someone else drives. Ok, just kidding, but, it is pretty laid back.

*An interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location ~ If you put it that way...Pratt, Ks is just a location on the map - it's the people that make it a community...a place to interact with all of our friends and family. A place I love to call home.*

